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.”

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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.

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Skid Row Residents Plant New Community Garden at the Star Apartments.

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

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 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.

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

Escríto por Thelmy Pérez

En el Día de San Valentín, los residentes de Jordan Downs realizaron una conferencia de prensa y acción frente a las paredes del sitio contaminado dentro de su comunidad. Desde septiembre de 2013, los residentes le han pedido a la Autoridad de la Vivienda (HACLA) a ser transparente con respecto a la contaminación en Jordan Downs y los riesgos para la salud de la exposición a las toxinas que se sabe que existen allí. HACLA ha respondido diciendo a los residentes que “el suelo en el sitio contiene bajos niveles de materiales como el plomo” y que “actualmente no existe riesgo para los residentes.”

Sin embargo, los propios estudios ambientales de HACLA encontraron plomo en niveles de hasta 22,000 mg/kg, mucho más elevado que la norma de 80 ppm del Estado de California. Además, el consultor ambiental de HACLA, contratado específicamente para determinar los riesgos a la salud de los seres humanos por los contaminantes en el sitio determinó que “el sitio plantea un riesgo inaceptable para los usuarios residenciales debido al plomo y Aroclor -1254 en la matriz del suelo y nafaleno en el vapor de la tierra.”

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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.

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 Nunez 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. Nunez 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. Nunez 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 en comisionarios de la ciudad. El alcalde Garcetti ha anunciado, 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 María “Lou” Calanché y Shane Murphy Goldsmith como representantes de toda la ciudad y a Daria Núñez 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 5,700 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 trabajó 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 Concejpal Garcetti y con una organización sin fines de lucro de desarrollo de viviendas económicas.

Maria “Lou” Calancha ha estado trabajando con los inquilinos de vivienda pública por la mayoría de su vida. Lou nació y se creó en la comunidad de vivienda pública Ramona Gardens en Boyle Heights y desde 2007 ha trabajado para 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 Núñez 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 toman acción sobre cuestiones que afectan a su comunidad.

Sra. Núñez también es miembro de la junta directiva del filial 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. Núñez co-fundó 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 implementadas 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 80% 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 Mar Vista Gardens resident Daisy, a flat rent payer and public housing leader, at the Collective’s February meeting. The Committee sees this latest shift in policy as yet another attempt by HACLA to renounce its commitment to serve LA’s lowest income families and vowed to continue to oppose this and any other policies that threaten to harm the well being of public housing and Section 8 families.

Please contact the Collective at thelmy.perez@lahumanrights.com or 818-835-1091 for more information, or to get involved.

Asequibilidad de Vivienda Pública bajo ataque

ESCRITO Y TRADUCIDO POR THELMY PEREZ

Los Ángeles podría tener uno de los movimientos de residentes de vivienda pública más feroces de la nación. En el último par de años, el comité de inquilinos de vivienda pública de la Colectiva ha crecido hasta incluir a 9 de las 14 comunidades de vivienda pública que trabajan en conjunto para abordar las cuestiones sistemáticas y las políticas de vivienda derivadas de la Autoridad de Vivienda de la Ciudad (HACLA). En los últimos meses, el Community Connection le ha informado acerca de la propuesta de privatización de Jordan Downes y los intentos solapados de la HACLA para mantener al público en la oscuridad acerca de la naturaleza y el alcance de la contaminación en la comunidad. Mientras tanto, otra política dañina de HACLA ha sido propuesta y debe ser abordada.

En la reunión mensual de enero de la junta de Comisionados de HACLA, el Director, Doug Guthrie preocupadamente anunció que en lugar de elevar las rentas topes (rentas ajustadas que no fluctúan con los cambios de ingresos de una familia) por el 3% aprobado por la Comisión para 2014, las rentas “topes” de la vivienda pública de Los Ángeles elevarán al 80% del precio de mercado de rentas en Los Ángeles ya en junio de 2014. En la actualidad, la renta tope por un apartamento de vivienda pública de una recámara 1 es $ 664, muy por debajo del promedio de renta en el mercado privado de Los Ángeles para una unidad comparable. El promedio de rentas por un apartamento 1 recámara en Los Ángeles es, de hecho, 1,083 dólares, entonces, la renta de esa vivienda pública de 1 recámara dispararía hasta las nubes, llegando a costar $866 y dejando muchas familias sin poder pagar sus rentas tan pronto como sea junio. Debido a la falta total de información de HACLA respecto a la cantidad de aumento de esas rentas en realidad, la Colectiva solo puede especular sobre el impacto real que tendrá este aumento en las familias.

“Lo que sí podemos hacer es empezar a organizar para informar y activar a más residentes para detener este aumento injusto," dijo Daisy, residente del Mar Vista Gardens, pagadora de la renta tope y líder de vivienda pública, en la reunión de febrero de la Colectiva. El Comité considera este último cambio en la política como un intento más de HACLA a renunciar su compromiso de servir a las familias de los ingresos más bajos de Los Ángeles y se comprometió a seguir oponiéndose a esta y todas las demás políticas que amenazan o perjudican el bienestar de las familias de vivienda pública y Sección 8.

Por favor para más información o para participar, póngase en contacto con la Colectiva en thelmy.perez@lahumanrights.com o 818-835-1091.

LA County Backs Away from Plan to House Hundreds of Homeless Residents at the Cecil Hotel

WRITTEN BY BECKY DENNISON

LA County Department of Health representatives announced at a mid-February meeting that the County would no longer be pursuing their plans to house hundreds of homeless residents of Downtown LA at the Cecil Hotel, which sits mostly empty at this time. Why? Supposedly because the County Supervisors believed there was too much opposition to the plan. The announcement raises several questions, such as who opposed the plan? Which supervisors made this decision? Who was even informed of the plan?

LA CAN worked for many years to ensure a variety of protections for residential hotels, including the City’s Residential Hotel Ordinance and a legally binding settlement agreement with the City and former Community Redevelopment Agency. Later, LA CAN and Cecil tenants worked to ensure the Cecil Hotel remained protected from conversion and demolition, as the owners tried to sue the City to have their residential hotel designation removed. The building is now designated as a residential hotel and cannot be significantly renovated, converted or demolished without either it being affordable housing on-site or having replacement units built for extremely low-income people off site. Simply put – it really can’t be used for anything except affordable housing without significant additional investment.

These policies and legal victories make the Cecil the perfect place to house homeless and other extremely low-income people – just like the “master lease” program that the County was pursuing which would have provided for renovation of the building and housing for up to 500 homeless and extremely low-income people. This could have been the largest ever single-project impact on reducing Downtown’s homeless population. Yet, the County is now walking away, leaving Downtown without this much-needed housing resource because of “opposition.” County representatives did not say who was opposing the plan, but the only outreach meetings regarding this plan that LA CAN is aware of were held with the Central City Association (CCA), in which it was reported there was widespread opposition. Although the CCA continually complains about homelessness in Downtown LA and calls for additional police to address the problem, in closed door meetings they oppose a plan that would have moved hundreds of people off the streets. Hypocrites.

Yet CCA should not be the only ones to take the blame. Our County Supervisors should have moved this plan forward. County representatives should have done the work to build widespread support in the community. At least two meetings were held with powerful Downtown business and developer representatives, yet none were held with Downtown community residents or non-profit organizations and collaboratives. There wasn’t even the chance for the Supervisors to hear from supporters because those likely to support weren’t even included in these discussions. As a result - 500 homeless and low-income people still without safe and affordable housing – when the financial and real estate resources were already in place.

Downtown residents will continue to fight for these resources and hold the County accountable to constituents that do not belong to powerful business associations. The stakes are too high not to. To get involved, join LA CAN’s Housing Committee today!
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 your particular situation.

Come to the DWAC Variety Show and see a powerful performance from Cynthia Ruffin aka Revolutionary Angel

I am privileged. I know that. But it’s a peculiar sort of privilege born out of having grown up in Canada, the daughter of working class parents: a hard working American father and a crisp speaking, stoic, and equally hard working Caribbean mother. An upbringing that blessed me with poise and a command of language that opens many doors.

I’m unusual, unexpected and at the same time just as ordinary as can be. When I see my sisters living on the streets, struggling with addiction and abuse, joblessness and boots that don’t come with God go I. I also know that as long as one of my sisters is not safe then neither am I.

The work that I will be performing is pieced together from two separate pieces of mine. One is the unofficial biography of my mother called There’s a Brown Girl in the Ring and the other from a collection called Random Ramblings and Suicidal Musings.

Big Love/Love Big
Cynthia Ruffin,
LiberationArtist/RevolutionaryAngel
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 refreshing. 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#ixzz2sKHxELa

COMMUNITY HEALTH

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.
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 call out the public space as a fundamental right to 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. 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 of LA CAN, Occupy Venice, Food Not Bombs, Hunger Action LA, and many more, decided to take action on the Venice Boardwalk because it is one of the most extreme examples of how homeless and other low-income people are being pushed out of public space through curfews, beach and boardwalk closures, restricted access to public restrooms, illegal seizures of personal property, and over-regulation of vending 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.

Later that afternoon, a lively and spirited march and parade of supporters from across the City - diverse in age, race, and current housing status - moved down the Boardwalk, led by the amazing Superbroke Brass and Tin and Strings Electric Marching Band. During the parade, a series of “sit-ins” were held to remember the use of the tactic during the 1960s to demand access for all to “sit-ins” were held to remember the use of the tactic during the 1960s to demand access for all to public and private property and to highlight the need to continue efforts to prevent segregation on the Venice Boardwalk and beyond. Speakers at each “sit-in” spot talked about the civil and human rights violations against homeless and other low-income people, called on attendees and observers to take even stronger actions in opposition, and utilized quotations of Dr. King to inspire and motivate as well as link the struggles of today and yesterday. Deborah LaShever of Occupy Venice called on the crowd, “We are here 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 they all agreed we’re 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 along the boardwalk, the Venice Beach LAPD Detail would be increasing policing in the area to a near round-the-clock presence.

Education and awareness events are crucial to broad-based support and long-term success, but daily organizing and education are also critical to ending and resisting 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 ericac@cangress.org.
Growing Justice: Residents Plant New Garden at Star Apartments

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.
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 victims - 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 right to walk across the street whenever they wish? 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.

Why it is difficult to convict a cop is because prosecutors rarely file charges or aggressively seek a guilty verdict.

TPP: The Trans Pacific Partnership that President Obama is promoting is a huge mistake. It will enable corporations and the mega-rich to move their businesses overseas where they can manufacture their products with cheap labor. This will lead to an even larger financial disparity between the 99% and the mega-rich. Wake up, Obama! Wall Street is not your friend, ally, or base. You need to back the American worker, not corporate greed and the TPP.

State of the Union: Once again President Obama is asleep at the wheel. Instead of placing the blame for the do-nothing Congress directly on the shoulders of the Republican House, he’s hoping once again that the public opinion is against the Republicans to make them change their ways.

These are only my personal opinions. If you want to agree with or counter these positions, send your comments to The Community Connection, Attn: Al 530 S. Main St. 90013

MLK’s Poor People’s Campaign and the Homeless Bill of Rights: The Struggle for Freedom Continues

WRITTEN BY JOE THOMAS

In November 1967, seeking a middle ground between riots on the one hand and timid supplications toward justice on the 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 significantly 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 toward 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 California 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- gotten one, was the Black Radical Congress [BRC]—a gathering of young and old left leaning activists determined to plot a course that would disrupt the full scale assault on the Black community. The occasion would serve to influence 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 Convention Movement of the 1830s and the Black Power Conferences in the 1960s, the BRC was an attempt to create an 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. Additionally, it openly set out to attack gender issues which had only been the subject of shadowy subtexts in other national gatherings focused on Black America.

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 challenged. 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.

Panels such as “Welfare Reform: The Assault on Black Women and Children,” “Black Radicalism, Black Workers and Today’s Labor Movement,” “Racist Ballot Measures in California: Lessons for the National Black Liberation Struggle,” “Black Radical Media,” or “Feminism and the Black Liberation Agenda” are but a few of the topics that would be discussed. Panelists included Angela Davis, Robin D. G. Kelley, Cornel West, Marian Kramer, Cedric Robinson, Michael Zinzun, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Maureen Taylor, Phyllis J. Jackson and the list goes on and on…but also included Amiri Baraka.

Prior to meeting Amiri Baraka, I had the privilege of reading his book, Blues People, published in 1963 under the name Leroy Jones. It effectively taught me to understand the role of arts and culture in teaching and preserving our stories. Additionally, it taught me the power of charting and owning our epistemologies. However, I had no idea what a fresh breath of air he would 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. Additionally, it taught me the power of charting and owning our epistemologies. However, I had no idea what a fresh breath of air he would lend to this gathering, and what an indelible mark he would leave on me.

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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 representatives 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 Baraka’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’s 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 abandoned 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 opportunity to thank him properly.

I guess this is my thank you to Poet Laureate Amiri Baraka.

Presente comrade…PRESENTE!

OPINION

Remembering Amiri Baraka
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I guess this is my thank you to Poet Laureate Amiri Baraka.

Presente comrade…PRESENTE!
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(206,615),(310,642) gave I 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 ~
“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 ~
“Grab the broom of anger
and drive off the beast
of fear.”
- Zora Neale Hurston

~ 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.
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. Instead of 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 AmeriKkka (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 for release, Governor Brown is seeking to fund more County-level cages throughout the state, to then fill with people currently incarcerated in state prison. His intentions toward realignment are of containment – not rehabilitation, change, or fiscal responsibility - 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 $300 million to counties throughout the state for more jail construction, as a result of California Senate Bill 1102. 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 LACAN, 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 December, Governor Brown 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 are no longer in the state and here, throughout the County of Los Angeles, are demanding community-based alternatives to incarceration. We are pushing lawmakers to end the prison system by re-establishing 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, mental health services, health care, healthy and affordable food, and resources coming in that are facilitated by the Real leaders of our communities, who know best our own needs. It is 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 not 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! Baca’s 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 Chowchilla 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.”
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To contact LA CAN or find out more about our work and how to support us, write or visit us online:
530 S. Main Street, Ground Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90013
(213) 228-0024

www.cangress.org
WEBSITE
cangress.wordpress.org
BLOG

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February / March 2014 Community Connection Team
Eric Ares
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General Dogon
Sean Gregory
Thelmy Perez
Al Sabo
Karl Scott
Carolyn Schaugaard
Jojo Smith
Lydia Trejo
Jas Wade
Pete White
Carmen Vega

Interested in writing or contributing to the Community Connection? Have a response to an article or piece you’d like to share? Know of a pressing community issue we should be covering?
Contact us at 213.228.0024 or drop by the LA CAN offices, located at 530 S. Main St.

Community Calendar
Feb 21 5pm Resident (ROC) Meeting at LA CAN.
Feb 21 6:30pm DWAC Variety Show. See page 4.
Mar 1 10am Homeless Bill of Rights Coalition Meeting.
Mar 7 6pm Resident (ROC) Meeting at LA CAN.
Mar 12 5:30pm Pueblo Del Rio Tenant Committee Meeting at James Slauson Park Recreational Center.

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REST IN POWER

Rest in Power, Madiba.
“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”

- Nelson Mandela
1918 - 2013

Rest in Power, Amiri.
“The attempt to divide art and politics is a bourgeois which says good poetry, art, cannot be political, but since everything is...political, even an artist or work that claims not to have any politics is making a political statement by that act.”

- Amiri Baraka
1934 - 2014