

A VOICE FOR
THE SACRAMENTO AREA
HOMELESS COMMUNITY SINCE 1997



IN
THIS
ISSUE

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 1774
Sacramento, CA

Volume 9, No. 6

Member NASNA
North American Street Newspaper Association

Nov / Dec, 2005

HOMeward

Street Journal

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by Gary Cox
HappyNews Citizen Journalist
www.happynews.com

Like most concerned people, I wanted to do something to help those affected by hurricane Katrina. Talking it over at a staff meeting one morning, I thought it would be helpful if some of us from the church could actually go there and help with the clean-up effort.

Our senior pastor said he would support the idea of me going with other volunteers from the church to the gulf coast around Biloxi. As I began to recruit people, everyone wanted to go, but only a few of our members were able to take the time away from work and household responsibilities. After all, I had planned the trip to last for two weeks.

I inquired at Loaves & Fishes, a community homeless resource center that we work with regularly, to see if anyone from there could help out. They were glad to donate supplies, gas money and some hardy souls to help with the trip. They even offered a member of their staff. Several of the people who volunteered were either homeless or previously homeless; yet, they wanted to help.

As it turned out, they were invaluable because they had experienced firsthand the ongoing issues of loss and displacement and were able to empathize with the victims we met on our trip.

Shortly after we recruited eight volunteers, we got the request from Presbyterian Disaster

Assistance to come down to the tent village they had set up in a ball field in the town of D'Iberville. The town had lost nearly 60% of its homes, retail stores and community infrastructure. The trip took us 2,300 miles through six states and the fringe of another hurricane, Rita, which was brewing in the Gulf, to our destination in Mississippi.

The evening we got to our camp, most of the tents had been blown down and the set-up crew had taken refuge in the equipment room of the ball field. Some of us weathered the overnight storm in small tents in the outfield. As I tried to sleep in the tent, I kept trying to imagine what it would be like to be lifted off the

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Katrina Victims Get Preference Over Local Homeless

Street News Service www.streetnewsservice.org

by Paul Rice
Spare Change News

Katrina survivors evacuated to Massachusetts are receiving preferential treatment from state housing authorities, in deference to local homeless families who have been on waiting lists for extended periods of time, Spare Change News has learned.

The Worcester Housing Authority has more than 25 units of affordable housing available that will be used to house Katrina evacuees who relocated to Massachusetts. According to WHA Executive

Director Raymond Mariano, a former mayor of the city, the units became available through "normal, routine turnover."

"That seems higher than a normal turnover," said Grace Carmark, executive director of the Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, a homeless and low-income advocacy group located in Worcester.

When asked about the response from Worcester residents currently on the WHA's waiting lists, Mariano said that, "So far people have been okay. One person wasn't too happy about it. We haven't displaced anyone.

We haven't pushed anyone aside yet."

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recently issued a guideline to the nation's public housing authorities (PHAs), encouraging them to amend their administrative plans to show a preference for disaster-affected families.

According to HUD, the amendment should "specify that families of federally declared disasters who are Section 8 voucher holders or public housing residents in another jurisdiction will receive preference over other

waiting list placeholders."

This guideline was issued on September 6, along with a request for PHAs to disclose their available housing units, a Dedham Housing Authority official told SCN. The source confirmed that people who had been on waiting lists for extended periods of time, in some cases for years, would have their requests deferred.

This situation is not isolated to Massachusetts. San Francisco is also undergoing a major turnover in public housing — just in time to

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ground in the tent if we were in a tornado.

The storm cleared enough the next morning to allow us to begin our work with displaced residents. Several were trying to get back into their homes after the first hurricane.

In the following week, we met some of the most courageous people I have ever come across. They were in shock over the damage to their homes, but at the same time, they were ready to do the work of rebuilding. They were reaching out to neighbors ready to help just as they were receiving help from neighbors

all over the country.

Group after group reached our camp in order to offer their support - every imaginable form of help came. Other municipalities who sent police and fire support, donations of supplies and medical support came streaming into that little town. I have never seen the flood of compassion fill in more completely in the wake of disaster than I did during that week. People were listening to cathartic stories of the night of the hurricane in ways that eased the pain and trauma of the experience. Our volunteers, who had themselves been homeless for

years, could relate in empathetic ways to the loss of homes and belongings of the residents.

As we left for home, we were grateful to have been part of the experience, exhausted by the work and enriched in faith.

We had seen angels in the outfield.

Gary Cox is the Associate Pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Sacramento, CA. For several years he was a green hat at Loaves & Fishes. Republished with permission of the author.

Katrina Homeless

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house Katrina evacuees — with 100 units being made available immediately, along with 100 more if the need is warranted. There are over 20,000 people on the waiting list for public housing in the Bay Area.

Comparable situations have also appeared in Cleveland, San Antonio and Las Vegas.

Linda Lera-Randle El, a street outreach activist in southern Nevada, is upset about the sudden availability of housing in Las Vegas because there had been no surplus in available units only weeks ago. At least 290 housing units earmarked specifically for the housing of Katrina evacuees became available this month.

Ken LoBene, director of HUD's Las Vegas office, told the Las Vegas Review-Journal that the housing became available through "usual turnover."

"I don't even know what he means by 'usual turnover,'" Lera-Randle El told SCN. "They need to update their terminologies. What that actually means is we keep these [units of available housing] for when we deem it worthy."

"We're not saying one person's need is greater than another's," HUD spokesperson Donna White said, "but these are families that have basically lost everything."

When asked whether or not she thought homeless families who weren't victims of Katrina had also "lost everything," White said, "Yes, but it's up to the housing authorities to determine what the need is in their area. HUD hasn't required PHAs to address the needs of Katrina evacuees, but we've encouraged them to. If they're in a housing crisis, maybe they can do a mix — housing one

local family for every two Katrina evacuees."

Homeless advocates like Michael Stoops, executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, said, "the new homeless getting preference over the old homeless is an issue that's percolating throughout the country."

"It's a crying shame that there were so many units of housing that could've been used for people in need," Stoops added. "I wish we would treat homeless people the same way we do hurricane survivors."

Joseph Finn, executive director for the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, said he agreed. "Homelessness doesn't have the same sense of urgency [in the public eye] as a natural catastrophe does," Finn said.

Julian Go, assistant professor of Sociology at Boston University, pointed out that "there is a long-standing tradition in the United States of dividing poor people into two categories: the deserving poor and the undeserving poor."

"The deserving poor," as Go explained the public's view, "are affected by an outside force — something beyond their control that makes them poor. The undeserving poor are people that have made themselves poor — somehow they did something wrong."

In response to Hurricane Katrina, Massachusetts has created many programs designed to help house its victims, including Operation Helping Hand, which turned Camp Edwards, a Cape Cod military base, into a living community that, according to Governor Mitt Romney, could house up to 2,500 people. The base cur-

rently houses approximately 197 New Orleans evacuees.

Prior to the September 3 announcement of the operation, the city of Boston was converting the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center into a shelter for at least 2,000 people, but work was ceased when Romney announced Operation Helping Hand.

Some evacuees have relocated to the Boston area, but it is unclear how many have moved here because there is no way to track evacuees who relocated by their own means.

Other housing authorities in Massachusetts are making space available to Katrina evacuees. The Cambridge Housing Authority has offered units to three New Orleans families, according to Josh Meehan, special assistant to the Executive Director of Public Relations and Policy.

"We couldn't wave a magic wand and create housing for people," Meehan said. "Our waiting lists are very long, but if you're granted emergency status [as is the case for Katrina evacuees], you go straight to the top of the list." Meehan could not be reached for further comment on why homeless people in general are not granted "emergency status."

Boston Housing Authority spokesperson Lydia Agro did not return telephone calls requesting comment.

Jennifer Friedenbach, organizing director for the Coalition on Homelessness in San Francisco, gave her view to SCN on the current housing availability: "When there's a will to house, the housing quickly becomes available," she said. "We want equal access to housing for all homeless people, always."

The relocation of Katrina evacuees will continue to be a very controversial subject among those who work with the issue of low-income housing. Sheila Crowley, president of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, located in Washington, D.C., said that there is no centralized authority dealing with housing for Katrina evacuees.

"People should disabuse themselves of the notion that there's some rationale in Washington policy-making," she said. "There's no one in charge of housing Katrina evacuees."

As for the housing of Katrina evacuees taking precedence to current housing waiting lists, Crowley was very specific: "I think pitting one needy group against another is a very bad policy," she said. "If you have people who are homeless before Katrina, evacuees should not take precedence."

But, regardless of advocates concerns, Mariano, the WHA's executive director, stands behind his goals for housing evacuees in Worcester.

"The vast majority of people don't share that sentiment," he said. "We're just doing what we think is appropriate."

As for Worcester's response to the disaster in comparison to other housing authorities in Massachusetts, Mariano was clear: "My guess is we will be the most aggressive housing authority in the state when it comes to housing Katrina evacuees."

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Child Slavery on Lake Volta, Ghana

Street News Service www.streetnewsservice.org

by Jennifer May
Ireland's Issues Magazine

Kwodje, Akwesi and Theko are three boys aged between eight and 12 who are enslaved as fisher boys on Lake Volta in Ghana. According to Kwodje, his father had given him away to his current master, simply telling him to "get dressed quick, quick and go." Because his father had commanded him, he could not oppose him. Since that time six years ago, the three children have not seen or heard from their parents. They do not receive any pay but are fed two times a day, which they say is usually enough.

Their diet consists of kenkey (fermented corn), banku (fermented corn) or gari (cassava flour). However they are often hungry and Theko mentioned that the last time they had gone fishing, they ate a few small fish which they had caught, and their master subsequently beat them.

They sleep in a room with their master and four other boys, but sleeping hours are short as they often work through the night. They say they are beaten with a cane and that their master does not help them if they are hurt. All three boys want to return home, attend school and leave this work behind. However, at the same time, Akwesi is afraid to go home because his father is the one who had told him to go with his master. Theko, on the other hand, has asked his master several times to take him home and, although the master has agreed, he hasn't yet brought Theko home.

These are just some of the stories collected by the organization Free The Slaves during the time they spent last March in the fishing communities on Lake Volta in Ghana. The largest artificial lake in the world, Lake Volta stretches 400km behind the Akosombo Hydro-electric dam. Children are forced to dive deep into its murky waters, some swimming for the first time in their lives, and untangle nets that have become caught in tree stumps. Many drown and many simply freeze to death in the icy cold water. Fishermen will pay up to \$170 per child, because their fingers are nimble enough to work the tiny mesh in the nets. They are recruited from surrounding villages, often with the promise of a good trade or an education.

The ones that survive are housed in cramped thatch huts, are inadequately fed and suffer physical abuse. Many of them suffer from water born illnesses like Bilharzia and experience stunted growth. The IOM (International Organization for Migration) reported that in one location alone, in the middle of Lake Volta, dozens of slave children are marooned in "Accra Town" a fishing settlement with no electricity or running water.

Formed from the merger of the British colony of the Gold Coast and the Togoland trust territory, Ghana became the first country in colonial Africa to gain its inde-

pendence in 1957. Following a long series of coups, the country restored multi-party politics and approved a new constitution in 1992. John Kufour became president in 2000 after Jerry Rawlings was constitutionally prevented from running for a third term.

While it is well endowed with natural resources, with twice the per capita output of poorer African countries, Ghana still remains heavily dependent on international finance and technical assistance. The domestic economy continues to revolve around subsistence agriculture, which accounts for 36 percent of GDP and employs 60 percent of the work force, mainly small landholders, but the majority of the population are still living in poverty. A recent National Population and Housing Census showed that 43 percent of three-year-olds have never been to school and 49 percent of the adult population over 15 are totally illiterate. A National Child Survey by the Ghana Statistical Service indicated that out of an estimated population of about 6.4 million children between the ages of five and seven, about 2.7 million were involved in economic activities.

Monika Pariah who works for the organization "Free the Slaves" spent 10 months in the Yeji region of Ghana working to free enslaved children and forge relationships with the fishermen. With representatives from a local NGO, APPLE (Association of People for Practical Education) and the IOM they spent three days in the region last April interviewing village chiefs, community members, fishermen and children working in the industry.

"The children interviewed during this visit were principally involved in direct fishing and/or diving activities," says Pariah. "The diving activities have brought particular attention to the plight of the children since many have drowned by getting caught in the nets below the lake or by suffering from shock when the water is too cold for diving. One member of the Ghana National Inland Canoe Fishermen Association stated that the bodies of children have been found washed up on the shores of that village and police typically attribute the deaths to drowning, a natural cause".

Free the Slaves employ the following criteria to determine whether a particular situation constitutes slavery: the person is economically exploited, is trapped and unable to leave and is controlled by violence. Based upon these criteria, this study found that these children were living and working in conditions of slavery.

"It is hoped that this report will bring attention towards this 'worst form of child labour' and that follow up efforts by Free the Slaves and donor organizations will help to rebuild the lives of these and other child slave," says Pariah.

Many of the fishermen working on Lake Volta who buy children are themselves poor. Some do not have money to feed their own families or send their own children to school. Their catches are small and they are able to justify enslaving the children by saying that they will suffer a loss if they send them home having paid relatively large sums to buy them. APPLE works to build trust within the communities and give technical support to the fishermen while helping trafficked children figure out what it is that they want: many don't remember where they're from, or are afraid to go back to their parents because they were the ones who sent them away in the first place.

"The problems of slavery arise out of out of poverty and the marginalization of children," says Jack Dawson CEO of APPLE, who has worked in the region since 2001. "And although many of the children are happy to be sent home once they are rescued, the major problems arising after their release is care and support by the parent who may still be poor and may still be struggling to survive."

Monika Pariah says that "any strategy that seeks to end slavery must incorporate a holistic response that moves beyond rescue and rehabilitation of children to address the root cause of enslavement." In the experience of Free The Slaves and other local NGO's the two primary causes of vulnerability are sheer poverty and the lack of awareness about the risks to children. Therefore anti-slavery strategies must work deep within source villages to enable communities to identify local problems such as lack of income opportunities, non-functioning and non-existent schools, inadequate health care etc.

The IOM will pay for rescued children to be educated, and their families can be given finance to start small businesses therefore alleviating their crippling poverty. In order to abolish child slavery the problem of poverty must be dealt with a grassroots level — with this in mind the IOM also arrange training and micro credit for fishermen and encourage them to start other activities like cattle breeding.

While these rescue programmes seem to be having some success, there are still

major problems of trafficking in Ghana. According to a U.S State Department "Trafficking in Persons report 2004", Ghana is a source country for the trafficking of women and children for the purposes of sexual exploitation as well as forced labour. As well as being trafficked to work in fishing communities they are sent to cities to work as domestic helpers, porters and assistants to local traders. Many are trafficked to Cote D'Ivoire, Togo, Nigeria, and The Gambia for forced labour; some girls are sent to Europe where they are forced to work as prostitutes. Ghana is also a transit country for Nigerian women trafficked to Western Europe and forced to work in the sex industry.

The Government of Ghana does comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, and it continues to excel at victim protection, particularly in regard to repatriating children and providing assistance to their families. It has also mounted awareness-raising campaigns in source villages and is training truck drivers to identify victims of trafficking. But there is still no specific law prohibiting trafficking in persons, although there are laws against slavery, prostitution, underage labour, child stealing, kidnapping and abduction under which traffickers can be prosecuted. Since 2003 the government has been working on a bill that, in addition to criminalizing trafficking would establish a victims fund for protection, rehabilitation and prevention efforts.

"There is currently no law on human trafficking," says Jack Dawson, "so we NGO's work with the endemic communities and with the children to field the impact caused by child labour and trafficking in Ghana."

Says Monika Pariah: "Organizers working in these source villages must also raise awareness about the ways in which a person can fall victim to slavery and the conditions under which enslaved children and adults are working and living. With this knowledge, communities can then work together to prevent future enslavement through vigilance over possible trafficking activities."

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A toast, gentlemen:
The good old days are back again!
The master is in his tower,
And the serf is in his shanty.
The Right has all the power,
And the poor do all the labor.
God is locked up in heaven,
And may the New Deal stay
dead forever!



Respite for Recovery

Street News Service www.streetnewsservice.org

by Billy Menz, Street Roots

Portland, Oregon:

Going home from the hospital is supposed to be a good day. But it can be a nightmare if you don't have a home to return to.

Beth, who has been homeless for a year and a half, spent a night at a Portland hospital last summer, was diagnosed with pneumonia, handed a prescription and sent out the door. "The attitude was, 'It isn't cold, you have antibiotics and you'll probably be OK,'" said Beth, who expects to have to go back to the hospital and didn't want its name, or her own used for this article.

She had no place to go, she said, "but I was clearly too sick to be outside." So she imposed on a friend who had a couch. That winter, the pneumonia returned, and three times she was admitted to the hospital, held long enough for test to clear her for possible tuberculosis, and discharged as soon as possible.

"I believe that if they had kept me long enough on that first visit so that I cleared (the pneumonia) I could have been spared the subsequent three illnesses and they would have been spared the cost of hospitalizing me those three times."

People experiencing homelessness who are too well to stay at a hospital and too sick for the streets often find themselves in Beth's limbo. Hospitals are not homeless shelters, homelessness shelters fill up with sick people, and the streets are simply too dangerous.

Beginning on Oct. 3, a new joint venture will try to fill that gap.

Oregon Health and Science University and the Salvation Army have teamed up to create a unique health service for some of Portland's most vulnerable citizens. The Homeless Infirmity Project, or HIP, a six-month pilot program, allows homeless patients adequate time to recover from medical injuries in the Harbor Lights facility in downtown Portland.

"We anticipate that the pilot project will bring in people who have sub-acute medical needs," said Maj. Kenneth Hodder of the Salvation Army. "That may mean people who have had surgeries and need their dressings changed or people who

may need to be under observation for some period of time, or people recovering from injuries incurred from violent incidents on the streets. In many ways we are exploring what kinds of needs there are over these six months."

The project is only a six-month pilot, but already Hodder and OHSU are considering what the future may hold. The Salvation Army is planning to redesign the Harbor Lights facility and the services available at that location. One block from West Burnside and the Old Town neighborhood, Harbor Lights is located among the city's concentration of homeless services. A strong partnership with OHSU could help shape the services available at Harbor Lights, according to Hodder.

"I think the first thing that needs to be kept in mind is that there are fewer than 30 such programs across the country. Based upon our research, this is a very rare combination of services," Hodder said.

It is a complex one as well. The project was originally set to open on June 1 but a delay was almost inevitable with a project of this magnitude.

Mama Flaherty-Robb, associate dean of the School of Nursing at OHSU, was an integral planner for the HIP. "I think that it was extremely optimistic that a volunteer service of this complexity with training and coordination could have been accomplished in that period of time," she said.

HIP will be almost completely volunteer run, along with current staff at Harbor Lights, a half-time program supervisor from OHSU, a registered nurse and a masters prepared counselor. Doctors, nurses, medical residents, students and others have "stepped up to the plate" Flaherty-Robb said, with more than 115 volunteers signed up and multiple organizations organized to get them up to speed.

"What OHSU is offering here is coordination of a volunteers program with a program supervisor in health services," Flaherty-Robb said. "And that is a whole bunch considering the huge cost of medical care. This is just the type of collaboration that city of Portland officials were hoping for when they adopted the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. The 10-year plan states that the community should not discharge people into homelessness, which is what currently happens

when a patient is released to the streets from the emergency room." Bob Durston, chief of staff for City Commissioner Erik Sten, said that the city has the HIP program on its radar but that officials have been focusing on other ways homeless people are discharged to the streets.

"We can't do everything in the 10-year plan all at once," Durston said. "We are focusing on a couple of areas, mostly with the criminal justice system for now."

Durston commented that the work of OHSU and Salvation Army is the kind of independent work that is needed to accomplish the goal of ending homelessness.

"We are happy that the Salvation Army and OHSU are taking this step forward. For the 10-year plan to be successful, all sectors of the community need to begin working on this," Durston said.

And the program is expected to save money. For years, the news has been that homeless clients drain the system of health care dollars with their use of emergency rooms for primary care services. The HIP program seeks to reverse that trend by providing needed services that could prevent future emergency room visits.

"We don't expect anyone who is mentally unstable or who suffers from an addiction to escape homelessness. So we certainly can't expect anyone who is suffering from a medical need to escape homelessness," Hodder said. "The beauty of the HIP program is that it is a win-win. It's a win for the people who have no place to go after being released from the hospital and it's a win for the Oregon taxpayers and the OHP because we can do for \$30 what a hospital would do for \$2,000."

Hodder is referring to the high cost of emergency-room care in a hospital compared with the cost of an average night's stay at Harbor Lights. His numbers seem a little low, but considering the amount of in-kind donations received for the project and the amount of volunteer hours that will be logged, Hodder expects that the HIP program will be a more cost-effective way to provide health care for homeless clients.

So what happens after six months is over? No one could say for sure, but everyone is hopeful that this program

will continue and become an established part of services available to Portland's homeless.

Hodder explained that the Harbor Lights facility is undergoing a change and that the entire building will be renovated during the next two years and services also could change. The partnership with OHSU and the success of HIP could be a key component in what Harbor Lights becomes over the next few years, and part of a movement the city should support, according to Bob Durston.

"As the Salvation Army redesigns their program they are looking to create new partnerships," Durston said. "If it is successful and the medical community sees the benefit of supporting this kind of partnership, we should have the resources to continue it in some form. The partnership with OHSU could be a good start."

A good start, yes, but the finish line is still a long way from view.

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OLIVER TWIST! A FILM REVIEW

Street News Service www.streetnewsservice.org

by Lester Gray,
Real Change News

Oliver Twist, Charles Dickens' second novel, was originally serialized in newspapers. As such it presents an unfolding life-on-a-precipice drama that kept the reader coming back. This durable and timeless story has inspired films, plays, and musicals. It is not one of Dickens most critically acclaimed works, but audiences love it. They continue to find its themes of crime and social injustice resonant, and its characters sympathetic.

Its popularity notwithstanding, the only obvious reason for a director to remake something so often revisited is to demonstrate eccentricity or mastery. With Roman Polanski it's the latter: his expertise evident in every aspect of this film, from set design to dialog, seamlessly imbricate. You could enjoy this rendition even without the audio track, the characters drawn effectively against a tableau of blended and muted hues, the fabric of

the society faded even in its brightest moments.

The titular Oliver (Barney Clark) is a nine-year-old orphan with a penury so profound he has to borrow his name. Consigned to a workhouse, from which he is demoted to indentured servitude with an undertaker, our young Mr. Twist escapes and heads for what he hopes is a better life in London. Hungry and uninitiated in the ways of the city, he proves the perfect recruit for a band of young thieves.

Fagin (Ben Kingsley), a fence for stolen goods, serves as mentor and supervisor to these puerile pickpockets for whom he provides shelter. Now grown decrepit, there are hints that at one time he knew of a better life. Now his survival depends on the manipulation of young minds and their conviction that without him, they would be left vulnerable in a predatory world.

Fagin sends Oliver out on the streets of London, to observe the old man's journeyman fingersmiths apply their trade.

Showing off for the apprentice, they get sloppy. Detected in their thievery, they hightail it and Oliver, although innocent, is arrested. In a "twist" of fate he is exonerated by the testimony of the victim. In an act of philanthropy, the young orphan is taken by this prosperous citizen to live in a luxurious home, the likes of which our young vagabond has never imagined. Subsequently in a battle of good and evil, both improbable and predictable, the young man's soul hangs in a melodramatic but nonetheless delightful balance.

But it is Fagin, brought fully alive through Kingsley, and to a lesser extent The Artful Dodger and Nancy the prostitute, that offer us full characters: conflicted souls in which conscience has given way to lives of crime. There are mild suggestions that these lives were not of choice, but likely if not inevitable consequences of poverty.

On the other hand, Oliver is a two-dimensional cherub, curious not only to the audience but to the film's other characters. The latter are alternately attracted and repulsed by his angelic countenance and

befuddled by his naivety. While young Twist is no doubt virtuous, his rags-to-riches journey is portrayed more as providential than due to any practice of the Protestant ethic.

Dickens' story, when it was written, foreshadowed the country-to-ghetto pilgrimage that was to become a staple of industrialization: journeys undertaken against odds made favorable only in comparison to the alternative of staying put. One hundred and eighty years after the first publication of the book, the story, on a global stage, remains contemporary.

Polanski, superb in his craft and possessing a first-hand knowledge of life on the streets, knows of what he speaks. He revisits this story, obviously feeling that he can tell it as well or better than most. He's correct.

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911 in New Orleans

Street News Service www.streetnewsservice.org

by Paul Rogat Loeb

We're told the 9/11 attacks changed everything for America — that they ushered us into a new and more dangerous world in which we could no longer afford old illusions. If we take its full lessons, the disaster of Hurricane Katrina challenges us even more profoundly.

The 9/11 attacks were horrific: wrenching for the global community that witnessed them, devastating for those who lost loved ones. But for most in New York City, life quickly resumed, although with an overlay of loss and fear. Although the deaths in New Orleans were likely fewer, the city remains a sea of desolation. It's an open question whether most residents will ever be able to return to resume their work, their lives, and their contributions to a culture that's given so much to the world.

9/11, we were told, required Americans to place unprecedented trust in their president and his advisors, and to scrap longstanding rules of international law and domestic liberties. It justified a preemptive war against Iraq. Of course it might never have occurred if the U.S. hadn't supported bin Laden to begin with, or if our policies hadn't so embittered the Islamic world. But we would all agree the attacks had a profound global impact.

So what are the lessons of New Orleans? We may call hurricanes acts of God, but Katrina was a level-1 storm, the lowest, until blistering temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico supercharged it to level 5. The storm's virulence was likely related to global climate warming, much like the recent forest fires that ravaged Southern California, floods that covered much of Bangladesh, and European heat waves that killed 35,000 people two summers ago. Ironically, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour played a key role, as an energy lobbyist, in convincing the Bush administration to break its campaign promise to support limits on the carbon dioxide emissions that fuel global warming.

Engineers and software writers talk of "common mode failures," where one mistake magnifies another and the cumulative impact is greater than all the separate parts. The New Orleans levees might never have been breached had the Bush administration not reversed Clinton administration policies prohibiting development of coastal wetlands that once buffered the impact of storms. The levees might have been buttressed and repaired had the administration responded to a 2001 FEMA study warning that a hurricane striking New Orleans was one of the three most likely domestic disasters. Instead, it cut the flood control budget of the New Orleans Corps of Engineers by

44 percent. They needed the money for the Iraq war and to give \$130 billion a year of tax cuts to a tiny group of wealthy Americans.

Finally, this catastrophe built on the slow-burn disaster that's been hitting America's poorest communities for decades. In one of the nation's poorest cities, vast numbers of citizens had nowhere to go, no transportation or money with which to leave, and no friends or relatives with extra space to house them. They are the people left desperately trying to get out, while the helicopters and resources of a third of the Louisiana National Guard are deployed in Iraq. And they will be the ones most damaged and most forgotten when the floodwaters eventually recede.

We're told we had to change in the wake of 9/11 or face future terrorist attacks. I suspect there will still be more attacks on American soil, and that our Iraqi invasion makes them far more likely. But it's also probable that unless we change, New Orleans will not be the last of America's great cities to collapse in desperation and ruin. Immediate relief efforts are critical, but we also need to address root crises: global warming, runaway development, deterioration of critical infrastructure, and a malign neglect that leaves more and more Americans poor and desperate.

Given that New Orleans may cost as

much as \$100 billion, what will be the level of destruction as global temperatures continue to increase?

The development patterns that destroyed Louisiana wetlands are being repeated throughout America, with the support of an administration intent on removing all limits on private economic activity. The aging levees are part of a deteriorating national infrastructure. The poverty that leaves people helpless to respond to disasters continues to grow, accelerated by government policies that transfer resources away from the poorest.

9/11 may have indeed changed our world forever, though I think we've drawn the wrong lessons. We now have a chance to heed those of Katrina, with consequences potentially far worse if we don't. It's up to us how we respond to the power of this warning.

Paul Rogat Loeb is the author of *The Impossible Will Take a Little While: A Citizen's Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear*, named the #3 political book of fall 2004 by the History Channel and the American Book Association, and of *Soul of a Citizen: Living With Conviction in a Cynical Time*. See: www.paulloeb.org

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Bait and Switch: An Interview

Street News Service www.streetnewsservice.org

by Timothy Harris
of Real Change News

Occasionally, the right book gets written at the right time and the national debate shifts. One thinks of Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring*, or Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed*. Barbara Ehrenreich's recent *Nickel and Dimed* was one of those books. This exploration of the world of low-wage work was on the New York Times bestseller list for ninety weeks and brought new visibility to the plight of the working poor.

Ehrenreich's latest book, *Bait and Switch*, examines the diminished prospects of the white-collar worker by going under cover to experience the humiliations of the corporate world firsthand. While Ehrenreich never actually finds a job, she discovers that all is not well with the educated and middle-class. As corporations churn their work forces in search of greater short-term profit, the professional class is very much feeling the pinch. We spoke with the author last week when she was in Seattle.

Real Change: I remember reading "Commute to Nowhere" – the story about the \$300,000 a year tech executive who winds up selling clothes at The Gap – in the New York Times Magazine a couple of years ago, and my assumption was that this case was too extreme to be representative. I mean, you hear anecdotes about unemployed professionals, but there isn't a lot of statistical data about declining prospects for white-collar workers. What's your sense of what the reality really is out there?

Barbara Ehrenreich: As a result of *Nickel and Dimed*, I got a lot of letters from people who were in a *Nickel and Dimed* kind of situation. A surprising number of them were coming from people who had college educations and Master's degrees, even, who had once held good white-collar jobs. To tell you the truth, I had not done a lot of thinking about white-collar working people as a constituency in need of my journalistic concern. But that got me thinking, "What's happening here?"

I did some reading and discovered that the white-collar corporate work world had become chronically insecure. That the relationship of mutual loyalty between white-collar workers and the corporation is gone – gone forever. That's what the book *Who Moved My Cheese?* is really about. It's a mega-bestseller. Corporations buy it, force their employees to read it and discuss it, and its message is "You're gonna be jerked around. You're going to be jerked around all the time, so just get used to it. Be like a mouse. Scramble for the next cheese source."

In terms of statistics, 44 percent of the long-term unemployed are now white-collar. The job search now averages about six months for these folks. Unemployment numbers are not so useful because, for one thing, they don't count those who sort of give up: who say, "Alright, I'm not looking anymore, I'm a 'consultant.'" And

there's no measure of the underemployed, the people who have high-tech training or some managerial skills who are now working some place like Circuit City for \$8 an hour.

RC: Tell me what happens when professionals look for work and don't find it. Is there a fairly typical downward trajectory?

Ehrenreich: Yeah. The first thing, obviously, is cutting expenses. There are all these newspaper articles that tell you how to go about this. It may mean selling a house. For single people it often means moving back in with parents – middle-age single people too – trying to hold on to whatever savings you have. An awful lot of people, even those who are middle-class, don't have any savings. They have debt. And the new bankruptcy bill of course forecloses the option of starting fresh. You're in debt forever.

At some point, most people say "Well, I've gotta go out and get a job as a wait person," or "I've got to go get a job at Walmart," or wherever. You know, take whatever. Once they get there, it's very hard to get back out. One, because you can't get time off for interviews or job search activity, and two, because that can't go on your resume.

RC: Then you get The Gap.

Ehrenreich: Yes. The Gap. No gaps are allowed. But there are some nasty catch-22s along the way. You're not gonna have health insurance when you lose your job, because we have this strange American system of having health insurance tied to a job. So you might have some medical bills you can't pay on time, and your credit rating is going to take a hit. More and more employers today want a perfect credit rating as a condition for hiring. Catch-22, again. The deeper catch-22 is that the longer you're unemployed, the less likely you are to ever get a job.

RC: In *Fear of Falling* you wrote about some of the common anxieties of the middle class. It seems like these anxieties are becoming more and more justified.

Ehrenreich: Yeah. Well, in *Fear of Falling* I was thinking more about the intergenerational anxiety: how you don't have a lot to pass on in terms of wealth to your children, so how are you going to get them into the best college, get them the best education so they can also be professionals and managers? There's a lot of anxiety over reproducing the class. But now, there's anxiety right within one's own generation: how can you hang on?

RC: You talk in your book about how being a desirable white-collar worker often depends upon exhibiting a sort of cheerful docility at all times. Is this something that goes back to Babbitt, or are we seeing something new here?

Ehrenreich: I think there's an old American theme – and I don't think there's any equivalent in any other culture – of this kind of mind-over-matter philosophy. That you control everything with your

mind. Mary Baker Eddy, Norman Vincent Peale, Dale Carnegie, EST in the '70s. And it's going strong. And I think that it's very flattering to the people at the top. Like, "I'm at the top because I'm wonderful, and I'm in touch with the universe." And it's very debilitating to people who are down.

RC: I get the sense that, despite your distance from all of this as a writer and someone who is quite successful, that your ego took more of a beating here than in your last book. How was it different this time?

Ehrenreich: Well, this was harder, there's no question. I mean, for one thing, in *Nickel and Dimed* I was actually working. I liked the camaraderie of the places I worked in – my fellow workers were very generous to me. But one of the things that really struck me is that it is more straightforward in the blue-collar world. When you're hired to be a waitress, you get the food to the table or you don't. In the white-collar world, there seems to be less emphasis on "What can you do?" and more on "Are you likeable?" Are you somebody other people "want on their team"? I don't get it. Too many mind games.

RC: What did you find out new about yourself?

Ehrenreich: I found some aspects of myself that were not too likable [laughs]. I surprised myself when I went to that public relations seminar so I could network with actually employed people, and we were given this problem to solve about a company that's facing sexual harassment charges, and some national feminist organization has moved in on the scene. Someone in our little group was saying that the first thing to do is buy them off. I found myself getting into kind of a mini-rage. "I am these people, they don't take bribes!" But then, the part that was sort of sickening was that I said, "Here's how you do it: We set up an independent investigation and put them on it." It went on from there. And I thought, "What am I doing here? What am I saying?"

RC: [laughs] It's like the Stanford prison guard experiment!

Ehrenreich: I know! How evil can I be? But even worse, it was also stupid, because I should have been just smiling and getting along. Instead of saying, "Your ideas are fucked," I should have said, "No, that's a good plan." If I wanted a job.

RC: Why do you think professionals working in corporations have so little bargaining power?

Ehrenreich: They have no sense of solidarity, no sense of collective action. Some white-collar people do. Teachers are unionized, right up the college level, nurses, doctors, all sorts of people. But I would say that is one of the biggest sources of a lack of power. A lot of them, in fact, are management: they are set against the other people around them. So what can they do?

RC: The jobs that you're eventually offered are jobs that have no benefits. There's no office. In the beginning, you pay them. In many senses, they're not really jobs at all. Are these sorts of pseudo-jobs becoming more common?

Ehrenreich: Oh yeah. Big change. More and more, white-collar people are in what can broadly be called contingent relationships to companies. Like being a direct sales person where you don't have any pay, just a commission. That's what was offered to me. You have no pay, you have no office, you have no benefits: you're on your own. Or, some of the people I talked to when I was working on the book, said, "Oh yeah, I have a job now, but it's a contract job." It may be their old job, but now they're on a contract for, say, six weeks. No benefits. And people go from one of those to another.

Gradually, the corporation sheds its responsibilities or its connection to anybody. First the blue-collar people got tossed out in the '80s due to outsourcing of manufacturing. And then in the '80s and '90s, it's the downsizing through mergers and acquisitions and outsourcing.

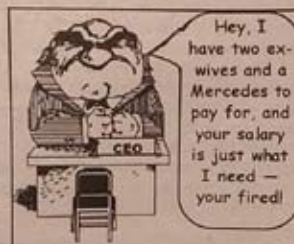
RC: You talk about the need for universal health insurance and more extended unemployment benefits as some of the things that would help. What's stopping middle-class unemployed people from doing the sort of organizing that you advocate?

Ehrenreich: I don't know. It hasn't been happening, but I'm going to do my best to stir it up. To help stir it up. I'm not an organizer, but I have a website – a shiny website that the publishing company set up called *BarbaraEhrenreich.com*. And I will be putting out more resources on it. More ways to get involved, and especially posting people's letters about what they're doing, what they think.

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Interesting Fact

Executive pay jumped 571% between 1990 and 2000, with CEOs of firms that lead in layoffs claiming some of the largest salary increases. See the report from the Institute for Policy Studies and United for a Fair Economy:
www.ips-dc.org/projects/excecexcess2001.htm



Key in the Light

♫ I'll take you where ♫
♫ Ain't nobody crying ♫

5 years ago I told Sac I'm going to find the low downest "bag ho" Learn all I can and marry him. I have done so.

♫ Ain't Nobody worried ♫

Pastor Brandon 1st to marry a gay couple. 1st to preach Christ & Harry Potter. Thank you God relief at last. Lord I'm doing as you asked to all those in authority over me and other homeless you have not answered.

Well, since Prop 36 (thankyou Adam) My vote for the "new world order" is Yolo County. Not up for option 6 months ago. What's up with that Sac. Onetta George you need my hel'p. What's up with that. Arnold, Bush you haven't responded.

Confess to me all the world. Key in the light I set you free.

♫ Ain't nobody worried ♫

Allies down - Love in the light

Janet Pickering

Just a Reminder, Again:

Everybody needs to have their TB Clearance card up to date.

All shelters and food service organizations will not provide full services without a valid card.

Your card can be renewed at the Friendship Park office, which is in the trailer to the right of the main gate. Office hours are every weekday, 7 am until closing, but skin tests are not done on Thursdays.

New people must have a chest x-ray on file at the county clinic.

Get it done before the winter weather arrives and you are stuck outside waiting for your results!

Happy Holidays!

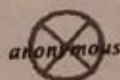
from all of us to all of you



Creation vs. Evolution

Evolution and creation are both true.

Everything goes through a evolutionary process, and everything creates unto itself. This is no mystery or a dispute between two issues; it is one thing: GOD!



Paid Announcement

Obituary

Mason
"Jimmy Mack"
McWhinney
d. 8/15/05

Amelia
Cunningham
aneurysm
d. 9/22/05

Regina Ellis
d. 8/17/05

Joseph Cornett
found in river
d. 9/25/05

John Oberg
homeless advocate
of Hep C
d. 8/25/05

Barbara Maxie
natural causes
d. 10/2/05

David Elliot
d. 9/13/05

Kathy Sutton
d. August 2005

David Jones
hit & run
d. 9/19/05

Melvin "Red"
Cline
d. 10/3/05

Whom the gods love die young
- Bryon

