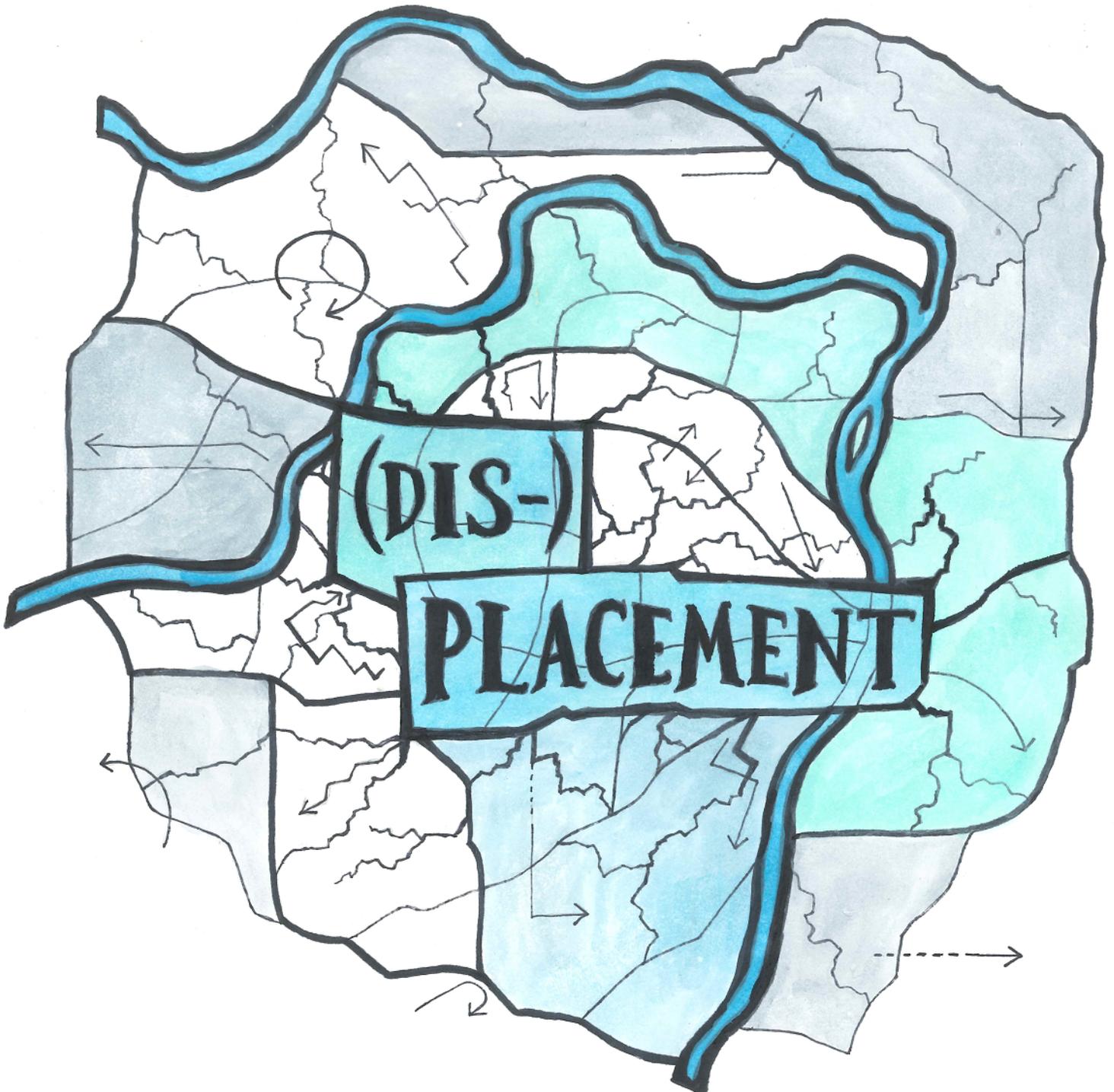


THE Round Table

Summer 2017

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin



Why This Issue?

"It's critical to understand that gentrification isn't just a natural process of people coming and going from neighborhoods, and that it's not a new thing. It's actually just the most current expression of a 400-year tradition of settler-colonialism and white supremacy in this country." With these words in her excellent article in this issue of *The Round Table*, Annie Girresch points to the common misunderstanding of what gentrification is about and why it's a problem.

I have heard many well-meaning people explain why certain communities "need" people to move in who have large incomes, so that their disposable income can revitalize dying neighborhoods. This fails to recognize how gentrification is the latest flavor of white colonialism: the "natives" – actually our siblings and neighbors – are painted as somehow different, portrayed as savages incapable of making "proper" use of the land and desperately in need of help from the upper-middle-class to "civilize" the frontier. This "us vs. them" divide is then used to justify the seizing of communities by the wealthy and privileged class, with little to no regard for how it impacts and often displaces the people who already live in those areas. This reality is part of what Annie goes into as her article explains what gentrification is and why it's not a force for good.

Accepting gentrification as a necessary part of revitalization also ignores the reality that these neighborhoods did not go into decline because those who live there are somehow more violent and destructive or intrinsically less capable of bringing income into their communities. Neighborhoods are targeted by politicians and business interests that enact racist, classist agendas, specifically designed to choke these regions of funding and to segregate the "undesirables" from the white and privileged. Michael Allen's article gives a history of how these policies have been enacted and enforced in St. Louis, and how the city's well-known history of (and continued struggle with) racism is directly tied to gentrification.

Also in this issue: Sheila Rendon offers her testimony as a person who's been displaced by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA). Stephanie Lummus offers the perspective of St. Louis Winter Outreach, a local organization, and their witness to the harassment of the homeless by the police, which is intimately tied with the issues of displacement and gentrification. Jenny Truax offers her perspective on the Catholic Worker ideal of voluntary poverty, and the ways in which that concept can actually reinforce the divides between Catholic Workers and the communities they serve. Gregory Fister and Jenny Truax tag-teamed the centerfold that explores the early history of St. Louis (1764-1845) and the displacement of the Osage Nation. Haley Shoaf offers a taste of what she sees going on at Karen House lately. And I answer a few questions that came in from readers in response to our last issue (Women's Stories: Persistence and Resistance).

As Catholic Workers, we long to create a society in which the dignity of all people is recognized and the ties of people to their land is seen as sacred. This issue hopes to offer some material for education and reflection, so that we understand how struggling neighborhoods are still holy places and recognize that the people who live there are children of God, who deserve to be respected rather than viewed as a problem or a blight on their own homes. We hope you find these articles enlightening; thanks for reading, and we'll get to work on the next issue!

- Mary Waters



Cover: Gregory Fister
Centerfold: Jenny Truax and Gregory Fister

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work. People working on this issue include: Annie Girresch, Mary Waters, Sarah Nash, Jenny Truax, Gregory Fister, Haley Shoaf, and Megan Macaraeg. Letters to the editor are welcomed.

Understanding the Basics of Gentrification

by Annie Girresch

Canvassing in the dead of summer is never fun. And yet there I was, knocking doors in the Shaw neighborhood on the south side of St. Louis, in the sweltering doldrums of July. Several conversations that afternoon with white homeowners have been swirling in my mind ever since. The goal of the canvasser was to talk to residents about the Mayor's plan to raise taxes for more policing. Standing on the stoops of their remodeled brick homes, white men in their thirties passionately told me how great TIF's and tax abatements are. "That's how this neighborhood came back," they said. When debriefing the conversation afterward, one of the organizers laughed. "Yeah right, that's how they gentrified this neighborhood."



Source: Postmodern Pamphlets Wordpress
Photo by Ari Elo

WHAT IS IT?

What comes to mind when you hear the word "gentrification?" It's become a buzzword, but what does it really mean, and how does it happen? Most importantly, who does it affect the most? Urban planning scholar Stacey Sutton defines gentrification as "the processes by which higher income or higher status people relocate to or invest in low-income neighborhoods...In doing so, they inflate property values, displace low-income people, and fundamentally alter the culture and character of the neighborhood." For many people of color and lower income people, gentrification means being displaced from a neighborhood their family called home for generations. Speaking about his lifelong home of Brooklyn, NY, community advocate Tony Herbert says "quite frankly, a lot of folks can't afford to live in my community anymore. Not even I." Whether priced out or evicted, the outcome is displacement. The very apartments and homes that were

once attainable for a lower-income family are now worth millions, and those who used to live in them move further and further out of city centers to find affordable housing.

Displacement isn't just financial; it's also cultural. Corner bodegas and street vendors are replaced by expensive boutiques and restaurants, and over time, people don't feel they belong in their own neighborhood anymore. A young native of the Mission neighborhood in San Francisco, Kai, became "internet famous" in 2014 when he confronted tech workers over the use of a soccer field. The youth of the predominantly Latino community in the Mission had used the soccer field for years for pick-up games. But with an influx of young white tech workers in the neighborhood, San Francisco Parks and Rec colluded with a private foundation to start issuing costly permits for the use of the field. The white tech workers showed up, reservation receipts in hand, demanding the use of the field and perplexed as to why the Latino youth



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wouldn't just get out of the way. In a video that went viral, Kai defended his field and his friends, repeating "You don't understand. This field has never been booked." The story couldn't be more representative of the culture and power dynamics between long-time residents of color and incoming white gentrifiers.

WHITE SUPREMACY AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

It's critical to understand that gentrification isn't just a natural process of people coming and going from neighborhoods, and that it's not a new thing. It's actually just the most current expression of a 400-year tradition of settler-colonialism and white supremacy in this country. Gentrification is a violent, forceful process that relies on exploitative and oppressive relationships of race and class. It relies on both the power of wealthy whites to force people to move and the belief of whites that they have the right to live anywhere they want, regardless of the cost to the people of that community. Aaron Goggin draws a very clear connection between the historic frontier and the present day:

"Now, instead of the west being seen as this vast frontier that is both empty and full of dark skinned 'savages,' our inner cities are the new frontiers. Displaced Okies, baby-booming yuppies and now millennials have been the explorers and settlers of the last century of urban colonialism."

This might sound overly theoretical or far-fetched, but just think of the language and hipster culture of gentrifying areas. We hear of "urban pioneers" braving the dangerous inner city. Hipster culture often pays awkward

homage to the Wild West or Native people. St. Louis is no exception – Cherokee Street comes to mind. The Whiskey Ring, a popular Cherokee Street bar, was literally built to resemble a cowboy saloon. Gentrification today carries on the legacy of white power in this country: the white ruling class dictates a constant shuffling of oppressed peoples from place to place. It's incredibly ironic – just one generation ago, the white middle class fled to the suburbs to avoid racial integration. Now the children of white flight are moving back to the city in droves, often seeking a more diverse lifestyle and culture and yet displacing the diverse people they seek to be close to.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

There are several ways that systems of white supremacy and capitalism create gentrification. One of the most direct ways that displacement happens is when property owners dramatically price out their tenants. Landlords realize that their neighborhood or their particular property is becoming more desirable, and is thus worth more. Suddenly raising rent on tenants by hundreds or thousands of dollars means that families and small businesses have to pick up and move within months. Landlords also have the power to evict when they feel that certain types of tenants are no longer valuable to their property.

Eminent domain also plays a key role. Eminent domain is the power of government to seize private property for "public use." Often times, universities are major gentrifiers, using eminent domain to seize property for their own development and then failing to develop the property for years.

It's also important to understand how other key mechanisms of housing segregation play a role in gentrification. Wealthier white people wouldn't be able to displace inner city residents without the earlier creation of the "inner city." Drawing again on the theory that gentrification is a new form of colonialism, we have to understand that the inner city is a frontier landscape that was forcibly created by systems of capitalism and white supremacy. Redlining is a key component of how segregation developed financially. During the New Deal of the 1930s, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) was created to insure mortgages in a response to the fall out of the banks during the Great Depression. A government-sponsored corporation called Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) created maps of urban areas, rating different zones on how insurable they were for mortgages. Green lines, signifying the best ratings, were drawn around areas with no African-Americans or immigrants. Red lines, signifying the worst ratings, were drawn around areas that were un-insurable – all neighborhoods that were heavily black or immigrant. As Danny Shaw points out, "in 1949, the National Association of Real Estate Boards made a list of threats to middle-class communities. At the top of the list were 'madams, bootleggers, gangsters and Negroes.'" Whites who wanted to purchase homes, then, were drawn into all-white suburbs outside of the city because that's where they could get insured. Black aspiring home-owners, however, either couldn't get mortgages or fell victim to predatory lending in the redlined districts of the city. This policy more than any other directly created both affluent, all-white suburbs and urban black ghettos. It also created a dramatic inequality in home ownership, with white communities owning homes at far higher rates than African-Americans. In today's context, this means that black residents are at far worse risk for displacement by gentrification, as they are less likely to own the homes that are increasing in value and more likely to be renters who get priced out.

Restrictive covenants and zoning also played a huge role in enforcing racial segregation in housing. Racially restrictive covenants were contracts on properties that specifically prohibited selling or leasing to African Americans. Property owners, real estate boards, and neighborhood associations all colluded in enforcing these covenants. They were perfectly legal from 1917 to 1968, and even after they became illegal, similar patterns persisted. Zoning in affluent suburban areas reinforces segregation based on class and race today. A lot of suburban zoning is aimed at preventing over-crowding and preserving green space – often very little or no residential zoning is allotted for multi-family housing units, little to

no rental units, and certainly no public housing. Priority is given to large, single-family properties that are way less attainable for lower income people and people of color. While the prejudiced attitudes of white flight played a key role in these patterns of segregation, we have 100 years of housing policy that also directly created these conditions. We have to understand how the current landscape of segregation by race and class came to be if we want to understand the "reverse white flight" of gentrification.

BUT IS IT ALL BAD? (SPOILER ALERT: YES)

A lot of people, particularly white people, have posed the question – is gentrification really all bad? They see "revitalization" and neighborhood improvements, and they wonder, isn't this a good thing? The problem is that when a neighborhood "improves," it doesn't improve for everyone. Things like increased safety, better services and schools, business growth, walkability, beautification – these benefit those who are moving in, those who can afford to stay, and those whose lives are valued by the culture. In his famous rant on gentrification, Spike Lee called out the racism in the changing dynamics of his family's long-time neighborhood: "And why does it take an influx of white New Yorkers in the south Bronx, in Harlem, in Bed Stuy, in Crown Heights for the facilities to get better?" Another argument for gentrification centers around diversity. People see integrated neighborhoods and they think hey, isn't that progress? The irony is that only one or two generations ago, white flight was rampant, as white people fled diversity. But it goes deeper – celebrating "diversity" ignores the problem that everyone isn't living in these neighborhoods with equal amounts of power. Black, brown and immigrant residents aren't asking wealthy white people to move into their neighborhoods. White gentrifiers bring market power and wealth to those neighborhoods; that changes things. They join neighborhood associations and take over. They bring a demand for stores like Whole Foods that drive out small businesses that have been there for decades. They call the cops on their neighbors of color and suddenly racial profiling increases. Ultimately, we have to seek improvements in our communities that center and are led by those most directly impacted by systemic racism and poverty. We need improvements that benefit the entire community, not just the white upper class that's moving in.

GENTRIFICATION IN ST. LOUIS

So much of the information we have about gentrification focuses on major cities like New York, Seattle, L.A., and Boston. It is widely understood that rapid gentrification is tied to tech hubs – the largest centers of today's



"We need social housing not yuppy apartments!!! Regeneration not (gentrification...)" graffiti in Ireland. Source: Flickr / Shiraz Chakera

Dispossession in St. Louis: A Short History

by Michael R. Allen

most booming industry. What does that mean for cities like St. Louis? There is no doubt that gentrification has already dramatically impacted areas of St. Louis. Areas like Lafayette Square and South Grand are classic examples of gentrifying neighborhoods. Twenty five years ago, these areas were considered undesirable by many white middle class people. Both then saw a “revitalization” effort. Houses were rehabbed, development committees were formed, neighborhood associations worked with law enforcement to “clean up” the crime. Both areas are highly desirable now, more expensive, and noticeably whiter. The same can be said for many other parts of St. Louis. But has gentrification saturated St. Louis the way it has San Francisco, or Boston? Being a small, midwestern city, we’re a bit behind schedule. We don’t have a massive influx of tech workers or industry at this point, which means that although these processes are happening, it may be at slower rates. However, gentrification isn’t really a matter of if; it’s more like when. In some ways, we are ripe for more rapid gentrification. Industry and political leaders here are desperate for companies and organizations to invest, and they give out tax credits like candy to incentivize development. Since St. Louis landed the contract for the new site of the National Geospatial Agency (NGA), we know that we are about to see changes. Construction has already begun in north city, an economically depressed area that is predominantly black. Will the massive industry growth at the NGA

displace even more long-time residents of the north side? Stacey Sutton warns that acting early is crucial to stopping some of the most harmful effects of displacement. St. Louis could be uniquely positioned to get ahead of the game. Gentrification hasn’t reached lightning speeds here, and we have a higher level of engagement from the community in organizing efforts than other cities. The police murder of Michael Brown in 2014 sparked an uprising and resistance movement that sustained protests for the better part of two years and mobilized hundreds of new local activists. The organizing community here is much larger and more engaged than in other similar cities, and I think that’s a strength. Community organizations are already trying to educate the commu-



A sign placed in protest at a new condo development site in 2006.

Source: Flickr / Abbey Hambright

nity about the impending changes with the NGA. In June, several Catholic Workers attended a community meeting about Community Benefits Agreements and how they can protect the people’s interest when a major development comes in. We still need to get a lot more organized, but there are groups already taking the lead.

SO WHAT DO I DO?

It’s humbling to learn more about gentrification and then look at myself in the mirror. Let’s be honest: I am your typical gentrifier. I grew up in a white-flight county and moved to the city as a young adult. I fit the “hipster” prototype, and I live in a neighborhood where I am one of very few college-educated white women who grew up

going to Catholic school. Regardless of my politics or my analysis, I bring unearned power with me simply by living here and being white, and I can do real harm. So what do I do with that? I think that for me, it’s acknowledging that no one’s hands are completely clean. Unfortunately, there’s nowhere you can live in America as a white person without being a part of a legacy of violence. This isn’t to dismiss my responsibility, but rather to acknowledge that we can’t reduce social change to individual acts of consumer choice. I can’t stop gentrification by choosing to live in one neighborhood or another. What I can do is try to reduce the amount of harm done to the community by my presence, and actively resist racist policies in my city and my

neighborhood. Some simple ways to reduce harm are not calling 911 on my neighbors, referring people of color to my landlord when there is an opening in the building, building relationships with my neighbors and listening to them, and buying from black-owned businesses in the area. And one way to fight racist, gentrifying policies is to support the work of groups who are opposing police violence or fighting for Community Benefits Agreements. Gentrification is on the horizon, and we have to resist it. Our future depends on our capacity to build healthy, thriving communities where everyone is cared for and has what they need.



St. Louis, like most American cities, has accustomed itself to dispossession of land rights as a function of city growth. The fundamental relationships of communities to land has been severed constantly, especially in the twentieth century when the city’s decline became evident. As St. Louis has navigated population loss and deterioration, the displacement of people has become so prevalent in so-called revitalization planning that it seems to be the actual goal in many cases.

The relationship to land has been a source of human identity across time, making its severance not only traumatic but an abuse of human rights. The history of North America, of course, is the history of conquest of Indigenous lands and nations, making the concept of land rights precarious. Yet even the Europeans carried with them ideas about land that ought to have guided a different set of relations. But their descendants have failed to honor those relations.

Across St. Louis, the cutting of any sacred ties to the land can be seen at Washington Park Cemetery, where the Missouri Department of Transportation sliced Interstate 70 over the graves of black St. Louisans; at the riverfront, where the city’s Gateway Arch marks the start of the city’s fixation on using eminent domain to solve its problems; west of Union Station, where one of the nation’s most vibrant black neighborhoods today is a forgettable set of parking lots and ho-hum office blocks; and in the parking lots of big box stores in St. Louis County, where dispossession has become a normalized part of retail development. Removal of land rights has disproportionately struck black St. Louisans, but has also been aimed at poor white people and small businesses.

Perhaps the history of dispossession starts at the early colonial period of the city’s history. The French town founders designated a large area south of the city as the “Commons” by 1775. As opposed to the Common Fields, where farmers rented linear tracts called arpents, the Commons truly belonged to every resident of the vil-



To have an honest conversation about gentrification, we have to talk about racism, especially in St. Louis. Source: www.zcomm.org

lage for open use. This was a European village custom. Residents pastured livestock like cows, pigs and horses there, and used the site to harvest timber for heating and cooking. When the government tried to appropriate the Commons, residents revolted. After the United States took title to the Louisiana Purchase, the new federal government took aim at the Commons, first restricting rights to timber harvest in 1813 and finally selling the land off for subdivision. Today Lafayette Square is the last part of the land to be held in common.

The next century of the city witnessed more division of common land, but as the city grew, land rights generally expanded. The city even began regulating the creation of new streets in 1867 to guarantee public rights of way for use by all. Yet not long after the turn of the twentieth century, civic elites began casting their eyes at the oldest parts of the city, finding them dilapidated and economically deficient in low rents and assessed values. The “blight” mentality was enshrined in a 1903 proposal



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to build a new downtown civic center atop the poor and increasingly black Chestnut Valley, and the 1907 City Plan for St. Louis called for sweeping state powers to reshape the city through new schools, parks, parkways and roads. The plan, the first urban comprehensive plan in American history, was silent on its real implication: few of its recommendations could be pursued without wide use of condemnation and property taking, and the displacement of thousands of St. Louisans.

Following the new city plan, the city's chief priority with land would turn to containment of the rights of those arriving in the Great Migration. St. Louis implemented racially restrictive zoning in 1916 (struck down by the United States Supreme Court one year later), and developed the national prototype for real estate covenant segregation in 1923. While the earlier arrivals to the city came in a period where land subdivision was rampant and the city saw no end to its own frontier, the city had built out barely 70% of the land inside of its boundary by the 1920s. There was space for new settlers, but economic constraints forced them into cheaper rents side by side with fearful whites. The earliest part of the territorializing of the land came through "neighborhood improvement associations" organized to develop covenants that would prevent black people from purchasing land and to discipline white neighbors into submission to the racist agenda. These were the city's first neighborhood associations. Again, St. Louis was not alone, adhering to similar patterns in border cities like Louisville and Baltimore as well as northern cities like Detroit and Chicago.

The Great Depression provided political cover for arguments that the city was doomed without massive restructuring of the physical fabric. The implementation of the \$87 million 1923 municipal bond issue realized many of the dreams of the 1907 plan, but used condemnation sparingly, and mostly appropriated commercial real estate. In the 1930s, the city saw its first condemnation and clearance of swaths of residential areas as the city implemented the expressway system of Gravois Avenue, Tucker Boulevard and Florissant Avenue – designed to circulate automobiles of middle-class families from new suburbs to downtown. Massive evictions in this period coincided with the construction of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, where massive clearance and dispossession began in 1937.

The Gateway Arch grounds site was occupied by many commercial warehouses, but also by many black, working class residents, artists, clergy and others who forged a community of the have-nots among the narrow lanes of the city's oldest section. There were 200 houses, but most residents rented. The dispossession here was predicated on construction of a new federal memorial, but

local political leaders like Mayor Bernard Dickmann and Congressman William Igoe demonstrated that clearance of the "distressed" area overrode the actual memorial project as the product of the clearance. Supporters of the project rigged a 1935 bond issue, and after the federal government balked momentarily at providing funds for acquiring what turned out to be pretty highly-valued real estate, Mayor Dickmann stated that the city would just build a football stadium on the site.

The federal government proved to be an enabler of dispossession during the New Deal. Although the Homeowners Loan Corporation (HOLC) never sanctioned eminent domain, its 1937 map of St. Louis (alongside other city maps) graded districts from A to D to direct federal insurance of private mortgages. HOLC then refused to insure loans in C and D tracts, which were graded based on age of buildings and race of occupants. Thus most of the city was not able to receive investment, while the suburbs could.

The federal government had other designs on the land of city residents, which was cemented in the passage of the United States Housing Act in 1949. The United States Housing Act provided direct federal expenditures to cities that had created land clearance agencies in order to relocate residents and demolish buildings in as large of an area as possible. The Act also predicated support of clearance on construction of high-rise public housing. The disciplinary engines of the federal government thus enabled the land agency of affluent St. Louisans, while restricting the rights of poor and black residents. Some relief came when the Supreme Court ruled in 1948 that restrictive real estate covenants could no longer be enforced by the courts. Some people escaped the federal paternalism and settled freely, finally.

Free settlement was threatened from the outset, however. The United States Housing Act funds allowed the city, guided by its new 1947 Comprehensive Plan, to condemn acres for public housing, with the largest undertaking being the clearance of 96 acres of the DeSoto-Carr neighborhood for the Pruitt and Igoe projects starting in 1952. This area had been part of the containment area for black population established in the 1923 real estate system, and had become almost all black by its clearance. Residents either accepted relocation vouchers to move to the new project, scattered north into the city or moved to suburban enclaves.

City Hall, with Mayor Raymond Tucker and Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority Director Charles Farris at the helm, pursued additional clearance projects. The coup de grace for the white planners was levelling Mill Creek Valley, the city's largest black neighborhood. Mill Creek Valley had become the center of black enter-

tainment and commerce due to the constraints of the real estate covenants, but blossomed into a vibrant area where 19,700 people lived.

The city used bonds and federal funds to start demolition in 1959, eventually clearing all but a handful of buildings by 1965. The land was carved up among corporate, state and institutional interests and never became a neighborhood again. Some residents moved into Pruitt-Igoe, but many relocated to neighborhoods like Fountain Park, Vandeventer, O'Fallon Park and the Greater Ville. Further clearance projects for interstate highways in the 1960s bisected the Pleasantview neighborhood, a black enclave north of Carondelet Park and demolished the homes of many poor white residents in south and north city. White residents tended to drift to new suburbs in North County and South County.

City Hall never abated its philosophical commitment to clearance as a tactic for supposed reinvestment, but its programs had diminishing returns following the public housing projects on the 1950s and 1960s. Clearance programs begun in 1958 in Kosciusko, a poor white district east of Soulard, failed to generate the industrial expansion promised. The demolition of housing in Compton Hill in the 1970s and 1980s brought an interval of vacancy, but today, new housing is being built on lots that the city cleared decades ago. Similarly, programs to clear the way to vitality failed downtown, along Chouteau Avenue and around St. Louis University Medical Center, and in St. Louis Place. Residents used the Model Cities program, initiated by Lyndon Johnson in 1966, to develop community autonomous structures in JeffVanderLou and Old North, but after President Richard Nixon killed the program in 1974, the City of St. Louis refused to find replacement funds. Instead, beginning in the 1970s, the city utilized a mix of federal block grants with local tax incentives, all driven by the "but for" rationale: but for this project, the city will lose tax revenue, jobs and residents.

The pattern from the city arrived in St. Louis County mostly in black neighborhoods: Clayton (1958), Meachem Park (1997), Evens-Howard Place (1999), Kinloch (1999 onward) and Hanley Township (2014). However, less wealthy white enclaves have also been pushed out for subsidized retail, including parts of Maplewood, Richmond Heights and other municipalities. The suburban towns' cry is also fiscal, but most often, it's the desire to

capture point-of-sale sales taxes to fund exquisite recreation centers, new government buildings and the like.

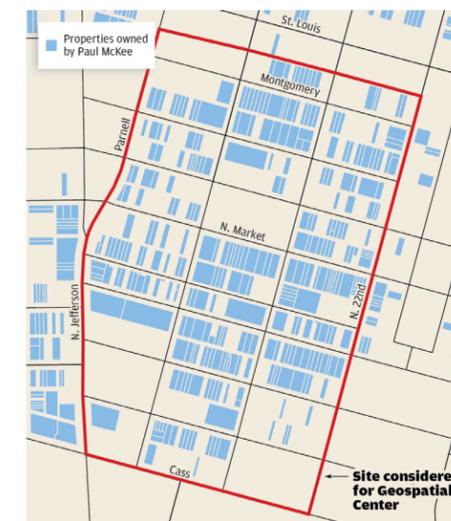
The but-for rationale – manifest destiny in reverse -- today is framed in federal, state and local law that leaves residents' land rights truly outside of legal protection. The right to occupy a home, as renter or owner, is a precarious fiction that depends on whether or not the state and its corporate partners have other designs for land. The programs of the past have reached a tragic culmination in the Northside Regeneration project, where land rights have been decimated for what is truly a land speculation project. While Mayor Dickmann and the Arch supporters had to devise a stadium to justify taking land, developer Paul McKee and City Hall basically have allowed the threat of eminent domain to hang over 1,500 acres simply based on a few promises illustrated by a PowerPoint presentation.

The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency project, which was more threatened than enabled by McKee's ownership, has been utilized to bolster confirmation bias around the agenda of land assemblage. Had the agency elected to leave the city, however, the developer and City Hall still were plotting ways to remove the residents of the 122 acres from their land. No matter if Congress fails to fund construction, or the job growth at the facility does not materialize, or the city suffers from ceding 122 acres to a tax-exempt land use – there will be elected officials and corporate interests declaring victory. If the victory is perpetually abridging the right to the land of the city, and the use of anxiety to police populations, then McKee's project is a big victory indeed.

Our relationship to land is fundamental to personal identity and well-being, and the history of St. Louis' disregard for land rights is truly a disregard for people. People who occupy land without title are often called squatters. The root of "squatter" is the French verb *es-quater*, which has a kinship to the Latin verb *co-acticare*. From *co-acticare*, Latin derived *cogito*, to think. Dwelling and thinking, dwelling and imagining – perhaps our relationship to the land will allow us to imagine a world where our place on it is no longer threatened by the state.



ST. LOUIS SITE LOCATION
The map below highlights the proposed 100-acre swath in north St. Louis being showcased to the federal government as a potential site for the Geospatial Center.



A graphic showing McKee's properties in relation to the 122 acres where the NGA is currently being constructed.

Source: City of St. Louis Assessor's Office

"Loving Our Neighborhood" and Saving St. Louis Place

by Sheila Rendon

In December 1963, my grandparents, parents, brothers and sister moved from the 2200 block of Carr, a 2nd floor tenement apartment, where my brothers and sister shared an attic bedroom, into a home at 2314 Mullanphy. This home was in walking distance, but a world away. Before then, home ownership had not been in the grasp of my family in the 40 years since my grandparents arrived from Arkansas. With the help of my family's church, St. Bridget's of Erin, my mother and grandmother searched several addresses between Cass and St. Louis Avenue and found a comfortable 3-bedroom brick home with a grass covered backyard bordered by mature fruit and nut trees that became the epicenter of our family for generation. Births, deaths, holidays--the occasion mattered not. The location was always "the House."

I was born into the family home in 1972. During my childhood, the once thriving neighborhood began to slowly decline. As the 80s saw the openings of St. Louis Center and Union Station, which provided jobs to my neighbors, I noticed buildings that had long been vacant but boarded were being demolished daily. My friends and family members were moving to the suburbs, yet those of us that remained did not lose hope that development would reach St. Louis Place. After all Union Station was a 15-minute walk from my house. It took one bus (#30 Cass) to get Downtown. We understood the value of living near downtown. We did not fear the encroaching boogey men of crime, poverty, vacancy; these were our neighbors, this was our neighborhood, not statistics. We stayed we endured and we created a community out of what and who did the same.

By the time of the 2016 decision to relocate the NGA to St. Louis Place, the southwestern section of the neighborhood was decimated by Paul McKee's neglect and the City's complacency. There



Facebook logo for Save Northside STL, an organization founded in 2015 to help neighbors of St. Louis Place Neighborhood fight eminent domain abuse. Source: Facebook

were years of unchecked disrespect and disregard for turn of the century brick homes that in other neighborhoods have been lauded as historic and architecturally significant. Buildings were ripped apart brick by brick in broad daylight or burned to the ground overnight. We marched, we complained, we wrote letters to politicians, we did TV and radio interviews. We actively fought to bring attention to a community that had worked endlessly to hold on until the "better times" came along.

The shock was stunning and sudden. No one believed that the City of St. Louis would take homes, businesses and churches to make room for a government facility that had been described as a terrorist



Sheila Rendon educating folks about the history of her neighborhood at an event in April 2016. Source: <https://nextstl.com/2016/06/city-without-empathy/>

target by Senator Roy Blunt.

The anger was palpable. Why us? Was it because we are black or old or poor? Did people forget that we were here? NGA West was described as a prescription for Pruitt Igoe, which had been demolished more than 30 years earlier. The Pruitt Igoe land would have been a better choice: nothing to take no one to displace. Was this a bailout for McKee or the Bank of Washington?

Why us?

I watched every neighbor back moving vans up to their front door, uproot 50 years of memories, and disperse in all directions. I wiped tears from faces of those that I considered my extended family and waved as they drove away. Some will not live to witness the promise made of new beginnings that the NGA will bring to their neighborhood at the cost of their homes. However, their spirit of hope lives in all of us. I was of the fortunate few that was able to find a home to relocate my family within the neighborhood as my husband and I tackle an arduous super-gut rehab project.

Our goal today stands "Love your neighborhood." Gustavo and I decided that we would invest in our community. St. Louis Place is like no other neighborhood that I have seen in St. Louis. We have low crime, long-term home ownership, good neighbors and a close proximity to everything. Our

uniqueness is a blessing and a curse. It is why we stay but also why it is coveted.

So no longer will we accept lies disguised as promises to turn around St. Louis Place. We will do our part to turn it around. We enlist our neighbors and other neighborhoods to challenge City Hall to draw up legislation that requires a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) in future development ordinances citywide. We fight gentrification and expose back room deals that would eventually tax out the existing community. We call on all those who looked the other way or encouraged the taking of our community to understand that what was lost was something precious and should never happen again. We draw on our experience with blighting studies, condemnation, eminent domain, court proceedings, arrest for protests, disparaging remarks made against us by our own elected officials and countless calls for us to give up and we redirect that energy to educate others to love their neighborhood.



Sheila Rendon is a wife, mother, and city resident. She is always looking to draw the beauty of St. Louis City from unexpected places.

Early Displacements: St. Louis & the Osage Nation



SNAPSHOT: Lewis & Clark

In 1803, President Jefferson commissioned the Corps of Discovery to explore the land claimed through the Louisiana Purchase, and to establish trade and sovereignty over the Native peoples along the Missouri River. Indigenous tribes received the Lewis and Clark delegation peacefully, offering support through food, shelter and guidance; they faced the difficult decision of how to interact with this band of explorers who were obviously making steps to bring settlers to their homeland. During introductory councils, tribal leaders were told they were the “children” of a new “great father” who would provide them with trade and protection. In St. Louis today, the Gateway Arch and associated Museum of Westward Expansion commemorate St. Louis' role in the westward expansion that followed the Lewis and Clark expedition, Thomas Jefferson's role in opening the West, and “the pioneers who helped shape its history”.

When considering displacement, an essential step for non-Native folks is to learn the history of the land they inhabit and ask a lot of questions: What groups inhabited these spaces in the past? In what ways were these groups targeted historically, and how does this pattern continue today? What does justice look like?

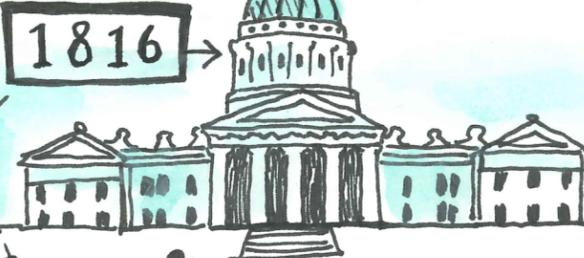
SNAPSHOT: MOUNDS OF ST. LOUIS



The famous Cahokia Mounds, built by the Mississippian culture between 900 and 1300, extended all the way to St. Louis. The 25 St. Louis mounds, located just a mile from Karen House, indicate a population of thousands. “The Big Mound” at today’s N. Broadway and Mound Street was the length of a football field and 34 feet high. A casualty of an expanding city, it was destroyed in 1869, the dirt and clay used as backfill and to make brick, the land used to build a railroad. Little to no archeological preservation was done. Today, a granite boulder with a plaque memorializes the Big Mound; it was relocated from the Big Mound location to make way for the Stan Musial Veterans Memorial Bridge in 2013. The only surviving mound is Sugar Loaf, topped by a house at 4420 Ohio Avenue overlooking the river. The Osage Nation of Oklahoma now owns the property.

Sources & further reading

Please visit the “Early Displacement Centerfold: Further Resources” page on our website, which includes an extensive list of sources, suggestions for further reading, and additional information about the Otoe-Missouria people, after whom the state of Missouri is named.



newsite.karenhousecw.org/



1764

1803

The Osage inhabit much of Missouri, but the St. Louis region is mostly devoid of people. French fur traders Pierre Laclede and August Chouteau establish an outpost in St. Louis, negotiating with the local tribes to obtain a lease on the land; no people are displaced with its establishment. The Osage accept the fur trappers as business partners in their thriving trade and a Creole culture characterizes the early years of the town. The French and the Osage live in close proximity, inter-marry, and live according to both French and Native traditions.

France sells the Louisiana territory (including present day Missouri) to the U.S. as part of the Louisiana Purchase. (Previously, this territory was controlled by the colonial powers of France 1699-1762, Spain 1762-1800, and France 1800-1803) The Louisiana Purchase changes everything for Native Americans living in Missouri. The relatively harmonious relationships between the Osage and the French end, and within 70 years, the Osage lose 90 percent of their population, all their farming land, and all of their hunting grounds.

1821

When it becomes a state in 1821, Missouri has a Native American population of around 20,000, including the Kickapoo, Shawnee, Ioway, Otoe, Delaware, and Osage. Many of these nations are living in Missouri after being driven from the east by growing numbers of white inhabitants.

At President Andrew Jackson’s urging, Congress passes the Indian Removal Act to free up land for the nation’s expanding white population. In 1838, U.S. troops round up the Cherokees (who have been actively resisting persecution) from the southern Appalachians and force them to relocate to “Indian Territory” in present-day Oklahoma. The northern route of the Trail of Tears goes through southern Missouri; Historic Route 66 overlaps this route from Rolla to Springfield. Along the way, 3,000 to 4,000 of the Cherokee die from disease, malnutrition and exposure.

A band from the Cherokee Nation are able to escape during their trek through Missouri on the Trail of Tears, Today, the Northern Cherokee Nation maintains an office in Clinton, Missouri (90 minutes southeast of Kansas City).

1830

The Missouri State Statutes are amended to prohibit anyone who is Indian from living in Missouri: “No person shall give to any Indian a permit to come or remain within this state; nor a permit, or other instrument of writing, with the intent to induce any Indian to come or remain within this state, except the proper agent, under the authority of the United States.” Many Native Americans are jailed or murdered due to this law; if they can “pass,” many take on new identities by claiming to be French, Black Dutch, Spanish, or even white.

1845

My Journey to the Catholic Worker: A Reflection on Beginnings

by Megan Macaraeg

One of my first memories growing up Pilipinx* and Catholic is my Grandmother. Her name was Isabel Palisoc Macaraeg but I called her Babae—in Tagalog this means: the woman who is the head of the household, a woman of power who has a thorough knowledge of something, a teacher. My grandmother was all of those but most of all, she was my second mother. She woke me early, while the roosters were crowing, and patiently but thoroughly combed my hair to get me ready for Mass. The Cathedral was not too far from our home—a short walk there, to the market where we bought food for the day's meals, and back again. Our meals were cooked in the indoor and outdoor kitchen. Bathing was the same. Sometimes inside but usually outside, squatting next to a tub of cool water with a cup. Family was extended and ever-shifting, as relatives and friends from more rural areas came to live with us, moving in and out of the house. Any extra space or food was always shared and I never slept alone. Home was deep and resonant with the smell of the salt air that came through the windows to stir our mosquito netting as we took our afternoon siestas. The Marcos dictatorship (a violent and brutal legacy of US imperialism and colonialism), the massive and popular uprising, and our subsequent departure from the Pilipinas were a rift not only in the fabric of my life, but in the very shape and texture of my being, and the small but infinite universe of love and connection that was my family. I lost the daily ritual of a Catholicism, so deeply grounded in place and culture that I only saw it years later as Catholic. I lost family. I lost my Babae.

I tell this story of my origins because I continue to be astounded at how beginnings shape our stories and our identities, our understandings of power and oppression, place and displacement, and the occupation of space. I tell this story because in its telling, I understand why Karen House and the Catholic Worker Movement called to me so strongly. I tell this story because as a non-binary, mixed-heritage Pilipinx Catholic Worker and child of the Pilipino Diaspora**, living at Karen House and occupying space in an increasingly colonized and militarized neighborhood

is a tricky thing.

Karen House occupies space within so many layers of history, on land stolen many times over from indigenous people and people of color. So how then, am I to occupy space, share space, invite others into the Karen House space, but also bring our work to the streets to demand justice for the most oppressed, the most marginalized, those who are being killed every day by a brutal and racist nation whose players are only escalating the violence of their tactics and strategies?

Meeting people at the door, meeting people where they were at, listening and asking questions was the first step to an answer for me. I found a solid and deep grounding in the personalism of being a Catholic Worker at Karen House, in striving to listen and see the humanity of every person, in being vulnerable and open-hearted enough to glimpse God in the face of any one of her children coming to our door. It is a difficult thing to follow, this commandment, but I wrestle with it and myself every day.

Losing my home and my home-land, constantly traveling through the United States after we emigrated here, being middle class, then poor and sometimes very hungry, then working class, fighting off racist assaults with everything available to me from other larger kids clearly trained to be fascists and Nazis – I had to learn how to let these experiences inform each of my encounters here at Karen House. But while compassion is often based in empathy and shared experience, respect is often based in recognition of difference—my mixed-class heritage, my education privilege, and that I am a lighter-skinned person of color to name a few. Negotiating gender in my daily interactions is frequently most challenging, where encounters at Karen House can vary widely with any individual's own relationship to hetero- and gender-norms. "How do I remain kind and vulnerable yet refuse to become invisible as a non-binary Pilipinx person," is a daily question I ask myself. "How well am I respecting the gender of others," is another. Each day there is a different answer, and with each person, there is a different approach. Sometimes, I fail. Sometimes, badly. Still, it

is a gift to have constant opportunities to navigate through my deeply intersectional identity towards personal interactions filled with love and justice, all the while striving to decolonize myself and the world around me.

I came to Karen House as an organizer for the last 20 years of my life, so taking the fight for justice to the street, witnessing the wisdom and leadership of organizers and activists in St. Louis has been a source of constant joy and pain for me. Joy to be part of and learn from a powerful community of committed people. Pain in seeing how much lies ahead of us and the inevitable violence that will confront us as the forces of fascism become bolder and bolder. In the midst of all this, learning how to bring personalism into our work in the streets presented a challenge as well as a great opportunity to shift my understanding of organizing: "how do I organize as a Catholic Worker" became the driving question. One way I think we have done this successfully at Karen House is to make our works of mercy very concrete. Instead of giving to the funeral fund of Isaiah Hammett, recently murdered by the St. Louis Metro Police Department, online, we gathered contributions at Karen House and delivered them with handwritten letters to Gina Torres, his mother. She invited us into her home and into her heart. At Gina's house, we listened more as she told us how meaningful it was to receive these things brought to her door. In our connection, we found out she was Catholic. We prayed together and held each other. We continue to be in personal connection and are working with ARC, the Anti-Racist Collective, to share weekly from the bounty we receive of food and household supplies.

Knowing and loving our neighbors, their personal struggles, the important work they are doing to fight for our neighborhood, is for me the next step in the journey. I have now lived at Karen House for four months and I am still learning how to hold space, take up space lightly, and speak truth to power when necessary, and remain in loving dialogue with my comrades and fellow Catholic Workers who are white.

Karen House is and is not a place of permanence. We have been a Catholic Worker house of hospitality for 40 years. The convent in which we are housed has been



Although this image is from the South African context, it calls us to recognize the effects of colonialism and imperialism on indigenous communities globally and locally, in the past and happening today. Source: <https://southafricatoday.net>

around for 100 years. Yet it is a guarantee that our community of Guests, Catholic Workers, and the neighbors who come to our door will be in flux. It's a reality that gives me the opportunity to continue the daily work of gracefully accepting change, while creating a home-space that is deeply welcoming to anyone who comes to and through our doors.



*Why Pilipinx and not Filipinx or Pilipina. "F" (along with C, Ñ, J, Q, V, X, and Z) did not exist in the native script of the Philippines (known as baybayin)—long before Spanish influence and rule. Using "P" rather than "F" is a way for me to decolonize myself and my thinking. As for the x, it basically says that there are only Pilipino/Pilipina people and no other gender. "X" is gender neutral and encompasses all genders that Pilipinx people are.

**Diaspora is "the dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland," (Oxford Dictionary). As more than 12% of Pilipinx people now live outside of their homeland, the Pilipino Diaspora has become a commonly used term to describe the migration of Pilipinx people. The Pilipino Diaspora has happened in waves over the course of more than 100 years and has been driven largely by US imperialism and colonialism of the Pilipinas. When the Marcos dictatorship declared Martial Law in 1972, a wave of Pilipinx people fled the Pilipinas and came mostly to the US. My family migrated to St. Louis in 1974.



Megan Macaraeg is the newest member of the Karen House community and can be found cooking delicious brunches on Sunday mornings and doing yoga on Karen House's roof on Saturday afternoons!

Criminalization of St. Louis' Most Vulnerable Citizens

by Stephanie Lummus

A young black woman with three children entered my office at Christ Church Cathedral in the summer of 2016. The children, ages five months, three years, and eleven years, came in to get a drink of water from the fountain. I asked Mom if they were okay and she told me she was homeless. She had left the children's father after being beaten. They had been on the street for four days, staying at New Life Evangelical Shelter on Locust Street each night. In her haste to leave her home quickly, Mom forgot the kids' shoes. At that moment, the five month old's diaper erupted all over the office floor. The urine-soaked, gelatinous beads filling the diaper flew in all directions over the thin carpet of our non-profit office. The three year old grinned up at me from a stack of legal papers as he grabbed a pen from the desk and prepared to decorate the pleadings. The eleven year old's stare from depthless eyes and a quiet, gentle face stopped me for a moment. This boy was perhaps older than I would ever be. One attorney went to the store for diapers, juice, and cookies. Our legal assistant played with the toddler to keep his artistic flare on blank printer paper, and I sat down with Mom to call domestic violence shelters. I was a lawyer for homeless people. I knew all of the shelters, the hotlines, the social workers, and the system. I had done this work for four years. Of course this evening, like many others, all the shelters, even the shelters for families fleeing domestic violence were full. There was no place for this family who needed a drink of water from our fountain on a blistering summer day in downtown St. Louis.

This need and lack of resources is encountered all too often by non-profits in St. Louis and by St. Louis Winter Outreach. Winter Outreach is a grassroots effort to offer aid to people who are homeless by offering food, shelter, and transportation when the temperatures drop below 20 degrees in winter. Winter Outreach also provides food, water, hygiene items and other necessities throughout the year. The organization meets regularly throughout the year to plan its outreach efforts. Winter Outreach



Source: DM Gillis / Vancouver Media Co-op

also precipitated the construction of the Assisi House project which offers permanent supportive housing for homeless individuals in St. Louis.

The people that Winter Outreach and other non-profit organizations endeavor to assist with basic needs are homeless for a variety of reasons. Some women and children live outside because they are fleeing abuse and serious harm at the hands of a spouse. Some individuals have felony records and are unable to find adequate jobs that sustain housing. Others are mentally or physically disabled and are unable to obtain needed resources. These resources can include psychiatric treatment, medical care, equipping to assist with disability, or Social Security stipends aimed at providing a subsistence level of income that can maintain a home. The range of disabilities that plague the homeless in St. Louis are far reaching and include anything from non-organic brain damage and schizophrenia to loss of limbs and PTSD as a result of homeless veterans serving their country. As with any stressful situation and untreated illness, people

may use substances to self-medicate both symptoms of mental health illness, pain from disability, and the emotional trauma of living outside abandoned by most loved ones and the community. LGBTQ individuals in transition also find themselves homeless when rejected by their support systems. Finally, those who are "rehabilitated" and exit prison are given a bus ticket and a small pittance. They end up on the street without any support system and a criminal record that will prevent them from finding any gainful employment. These people are the most vulnerable among us because they are unable through their own efforts to overcome their physiological and societal challenges without assistance.

That necessary assistance takes many forms. Often it comes in the form of sanctioned government programs meant to meet the need of those who are unable to adequately provide for themselves. The City of St. Louis operates a Department of Human Services meant to address the issue of homelessness and offer services to those experiencing this need. The City has operated and coordinated a system of shelters over the years but the space in these shelters is limited. New Life Evangelical Center provided a stop gap for those without homes by offering a meal and a place to sleep. The Bridge day shelter offered showers and a meal for homeless people from the confines of Centenary Church. Winter Outreach was formed out of necessity when during the extreme temperatures in winter, the homeless were left outside without anywhere to take shelter. Both the Bridge and New Life Evangelical Center have closed after opposition from developers, property owners, and government entities facilitated their eventual demise.

The plight of those without homes is not a new phenomenon in any major city including St. Louis. However, the revitalization of the downtown area surrounding New Life Evangelical Center and Washington Avenue brought the issue of unhoused people into stark contrast with the trendy loft owners who were interested in taking in a Cardinals game and walking to the local pub afterward. As this development has reached new heights in recent years, development entrepreneurs and the patrons of their product have decided that people existing outside puts a damper on commerce, business, retail, and recreation. Perhaps they do not want to be reminded of the vulnerable among us. Perhaps they are afraid of what they do not understand. In either case it is surmised that these entities' hue and cry to the City government surrounding the homeless of downtown St. Louis and those

organizations and individuals who would offer them some meager assistance at survival spawned the uptick in warrantless searches and over-policing of homeless individuals.

The property owners voiced their concerns to the government and the government responded in kind, particularly within the last five years. A homeless person is forever on the wrong side of the law by virtue of their very existence. It is a crime to loiter in an area for an extended period of time. It is also a crime to impede the flow of traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian, through an individual's presence or activities. It is a crime to trespass in a business in order to use the bathroom without being a consumer of that business. By the way, it is also a crime to urinate or defecate in public. As if criminalizing a human's ability to urinate at all, anywhere at any time wasn't bad enough, Alderman Jack Coatar has attempted through Board Bill 66 to make offering homeless individuals any item not registered by permit a crime as well. The options for the unhoused are limited. The places to sleep and ways to eat are also limited. Any space they occupy is owned by someone else as is the food they eat or the place they lay their head at night. They can be charged with trespass by attempting to sleep indoors to protect against the weather and anyone who might harm them unawares. They can be cited for panhandling when asking for food, money, or other items. They can be cited for public intoxication if they drink outside. If they raise their voices they can also be charged with peace disturbance. An untreated homeless person with schizophrenia will have trouble



Source: <https://popularrresistance.org/housing-activist-asata-tigrai-on-gentrification-in-providence/>



Stephanie Lummus is an attorney who previously worked with Arch City Defenders and now works with Catholic Legal Services.

comporting themselves within any of those confines set by society at any given time.

While policing the homeless has been a regular occurrence within St. Louis, the unhoused began to report increased interactions, increased ticketing, increased incarceration, and increased warrantless searches in an around Lucas Park at Locust and 14th Street among other areas. The over policing of the unhoused reached a fervor after a woman was shot on Washington Avenue by men who were not homeless or from the City of St. Louis. In the summer of 2016 and beyond, law enforcement officers arrived in Lucas Park with five squad cars and began questioning the homeless sitting along the fence. They asked for names and Social Security numbers. Community organizers witnessed these searches, lawyers for the homeless defended against these poverty crimes, and grassroots organizers protested the closing of the New Life Evangelical Center as well as the clearing of parks and downtown neighborhoods where St. Louis' most vulnerable citizens slept at night. If the City provided adequate resources to assist these people, the demonization of NLEC and the clearing of homeless camps and corners may have buffered some of the harm done to the homeless.

By virtue of their situation, their vulnerability, and the lack of resources needed to raise them out of homelessness and poverty, the homeless in St. Louis are trapped in a cycle of deprivation and despair. They cannot complete basic human functions such as sleeping, eating, standing, sitting, and using the bathroom without violating an ordinance set down by the City of St. Louis. They cannot access housing, mental health care, medical care, substance abuse treatment and other supportive services when there are not enough to go around. Further, when they complete these basic human functions, they are ticketed, fined, admonished, harassed by law enforcement, and incarcerated. Further, homeless people are subjected to a stigma that makes them less likely to receive equal treatment from hospital emergency rooms or law enforcement officers. Homeless women who have reported attempted rapes and assaults are often told that law enforcement would not assist them due to their status as unhoused.

In order to provide data to support the countless testimony from homeless individuals and eyewitness accounts from community organizers, Winter Outreach engaged in a survey of homeless people to discuss their treatment by law enforcement. We surveyed 83 homeless individuals in downtown St. Louis at Lucas Park, Church on the Street Dinner for the Homeless,

St. Patrick's Center, Christ Church Cathedral, and New Life Evangelical Center. Of the people we surveyed, 83 homeless individuals chose to participate. Of those 83 people, 80% were male, 55% were black, and 58% were over the age of 45 years old. Of the entire surveyed population, 65% had been stopped and harassed by police without a citation being issued. Of the group who reported being harassed, 28% reported being harassed more than five times in the last six months.

In our survey, we asked homeless individuals if they had been charged with any of the following poverty crimes: Trespass, Loitering, Drinking in Public, Peace Disturbance, Panhandling, Violating Park Curfew, Urinating or Defecating in Public, Impeding the Flow of Pedestrian Traffic, No Occupancy Permit, or Violation of a Neighborhood Order of Protection. After four years working exclusively with the homeless in St. Louis, my non-profit legal aid organization recognized that these were the crimes most likely to be charged of our clients. The results were fairly typical of what our experience representing the homeless in St. Louis led us to believe. Of the 83 surveyed, 21% had active warrants or a pending case in the St. Louis City Municipal Court. Over half had been charged with Trespass or No Occupancy Permit for sleeping where they were not allowed. Loitering tickets had been received by 36% of the participants while 33% were charged with Drinking in Public. Peace Disturbance tickets had been given to 22% of those surveyed while Panhandling and Violation of Park Curfew citations both affected 21% of the population.

These numbers demonstrate both the harassment and the use of penal institutions to punish those who are vulnerable and without means in St. Louis. The ironic realization in St. Louis is that we punish those who are disabled, addicted, jobless, and alone without recognizing we are punishing people for basic human function, lack of resources, and for societal processes the unhoused are powerless to stop. Through the closing of key stop-gap measures in downtown St. Louis that provided even meager resources to a vulnerable population, St. Louis has exacerbated the problem by criminalizing the poor, the sick, and those without means. In addition to a lack of resources and consistent pressure from developers, law enforcement have been given marching orders to clear downtown parks of St. Louis' vulnerable citizens. Perhaps it would be different if they had somewhere to go.



Letter to the Editor Responses

Women's Stories: Resistance and Persistence

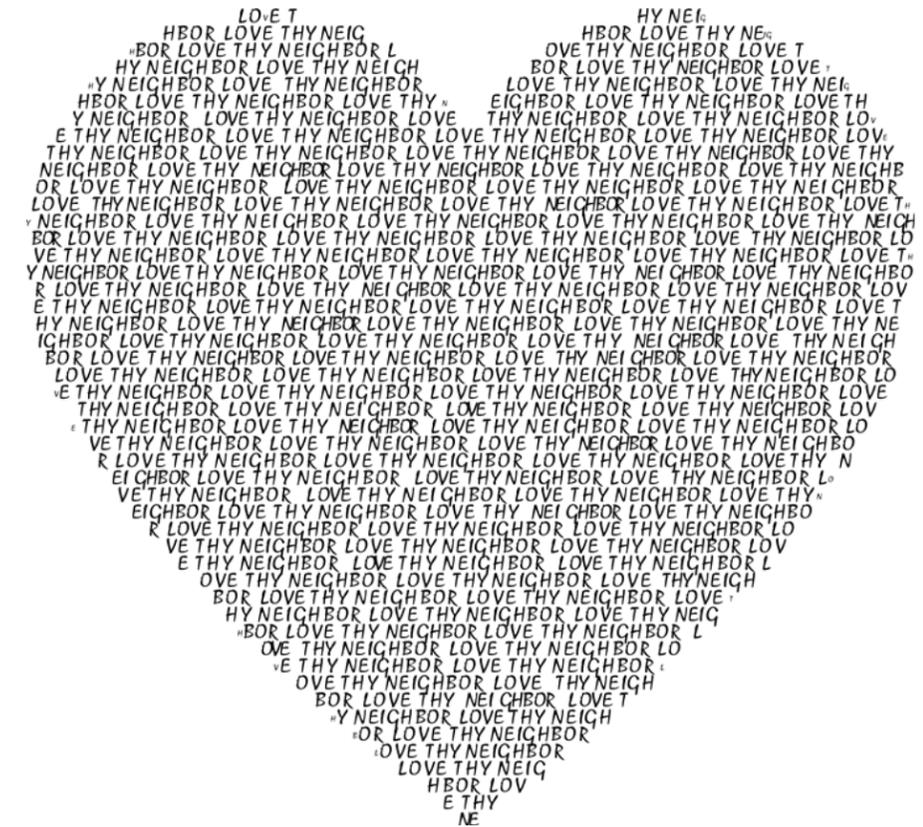
by **Mary Waters**

Our last issue on women's stories in resistance movements generated a lot of discussion!

One reader, Bryan Kirchoff, sent us a very detailed analysis of his centrist take on many of the leftist issues covered in our last issue, and while I would love to give an equally thorough response, I've been given a very small amount of space in which to write! So I'd like to focus primarily on some of the trans- and gender-related questions, where I feel that the lived experience of my transgender identity gives me some particular insight.

"Are men inherently patriarchal, and, if so, does that include trans men?" I think that the relationship to gendered systems of privilege and oppression are complicated for transgender people. As a trans woman,

I absolutely suffer under sexist power structures; but because I personally am a trans woman who was raised as a man until I was a young adult, I also internalized a lot of sexist beliefs that I have had to work through. But this complicated relationship does not justify denying the identity of transgender individuals: trans women might experience sexism differently than cis women, but white women also experience sexism differently than women of color. All are equally women. And I bring this up because I think it's related to the question of whether trans men are inherently patriarchal (which I am interpreting as inherently sexist). The focus in conversations of privilege and oppression should not be on whether one is guilty of reinforcing oppressive structures or not: instead, with



Source: OpenClipArt.org



Mary Waters is a recent SLU grad who loves to geek out about theology and feminism -- especially when the two intersect. She also loves to educate on trans issues. She's most often seen pattering around Karen House, trying to look busy for the rest of the core community :3

an understanding that “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) we should worry less about who is to blame and focus more on changing these systems of privilege.

Bryan also asked about a line in my reflection where I admit that I felt unfeminine because I wasn't crying. He felt that associating women with crying was a sexist assumption, and I agree. Attitudes born from sexism (and racism, ableism, etc.) can be internalized by those who suffer under sexism. I shared that not because I felt it was the right way to feel, but because that's how I felt. It was a day that I was particularly aware of my trans identity, at first in a positive and then a negative way, and so I fell back on sexist definitions of womanhood to reflect on my own femininity in what was a moment of vulnerability and sadness for me. If someone told me they felt how I felt, I'd hope they could come to understand that one's feminine identity isn't tied to your ability to cry. But I also hope that they'd take comfort in knowing that I (and many others) have fallen into the trap of believing that myself.

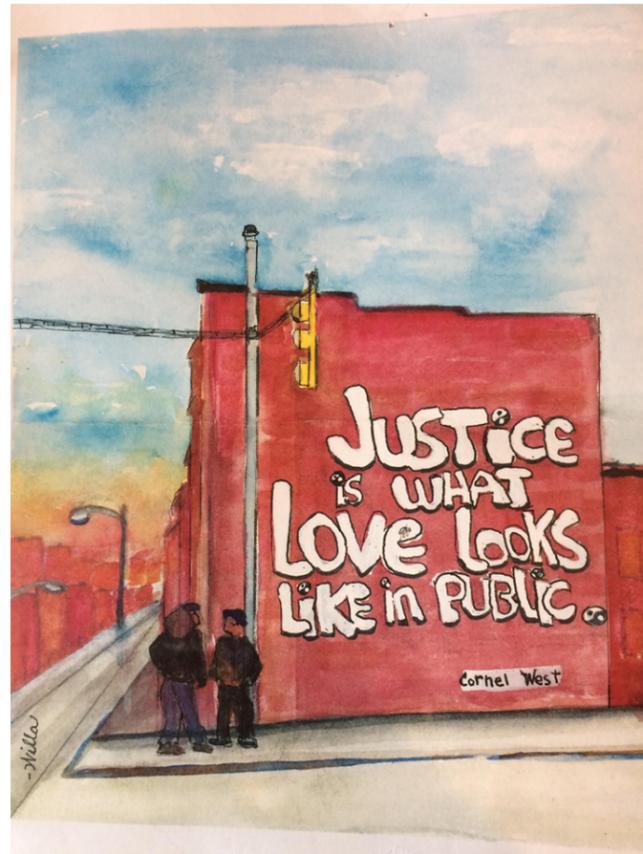
Finally, Bryan brought up the case of Rachel Dolezal, who is a white woman who claims black identity. His question was whether we should respect her identity because we respect the identities of transgender people. As a white woman, I am perhaps not the best person to speak to all the reasons Dolezal's “racial transition” should be viewed as a brutal appropriation of black identity. But as a trans woman and an ally to people of color, the mere mention of her name is enough to irritate me. Dolezal has put on the persona of a black woman; when I transitioned, I was taking off the persona of a man and allowing society to see my most authentic self. And so, by partaking in a similar but inverted transition, Dolezal has caused immense harm to both the black and trans communities, and I wish that I'd had an opportunity to speak with a trans person of color, whose outrage I can only imagine.

Gene Roman wrote to express his concern over the inclusion of Angela Davis on the cover of the last issue. It was his conviction that “there is too much hagiography of terrorist groups like . . . the Black Panthers. . . among the Catholic left.” First, I think it's important to realize that an admiration for Davis doesn't necessarily translate to an endorsement of the Black Panthers. Davis has led a big and complicated life, and her close ties to the Panthers should not necessarily be viewed as the bulk of her work, which included a distinguished tenure at UC - Santa Cruz and leadership of the US Communist Party.

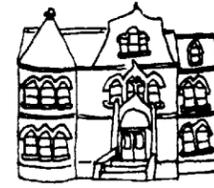
But we don't need to turn a blind eye to her work in

the Civil Rights movement and how it brought her into the orbit of the Panthers, either. Whatever your views on the Panthers, to view them as a purely evil organization is an overstatement. There are many good actors within problematic organizations – and, of course, even within organizations as venerable as our own Catholic Church there are dark chapters in their histories and figures who should rightly be cast in a negative light. Again, rather than focusing on the ways in which you find the Panthers problematic, I would encourage white people to reflect on the fact that for so many people of color they are a beloved organization seen as fighting valiantly for their liberation. We should try to understand why they are so beloved, to work so that we are seen as being equally strong allies to communities of color.

But no matter how visceral your opposition to the Black Panthers, I would encourage anyone troubled by our decision to feature Davis to view her on her own terms, and not purely as a symbol of any particular community.



Source: Willa Bickham



From Karen House

by Haley Shoaf

Forget your perfect offering (forget your perfect offering)
 Just sing the song that you can sing (just sing the song that you can sing)
 There's a crack in everything (there's a crack in everything)
 That's how (that's how)
 The light (the light)
 That's how (that's how)
 The light gets in.

I first heard this call and response song a few weeks ago at a Wednesday night prayer circle. A fairly recent addition to the Karen House calendar, on Wednesday nights the community room has taken to opening its doors to a free flowing array of song, prayer, sharing and general togetherness.

This is just one of a myriad of beautiful changes and evolutions that have been ushered in as summer takes its hot, sticky hold on St. Louis.

Part of the magic of Karen House is that it is always changing, and yet somehow always the same. Over the past few months, new faces have appeared, there is new energy and excitement, and with that come new challenges and opportunities. Like flowers appearing unexpectedly in the cracks of the sidewalk juxtaposed against the malaise of 102 degree heat, the vibrancy of community shines exceptionally bright.

When I read Jenny's email asking if I could write “From Karen House,” my first thought was “but I don't live at Karen House!” While lately I have found myself spending more and more time at the house, it's true that my

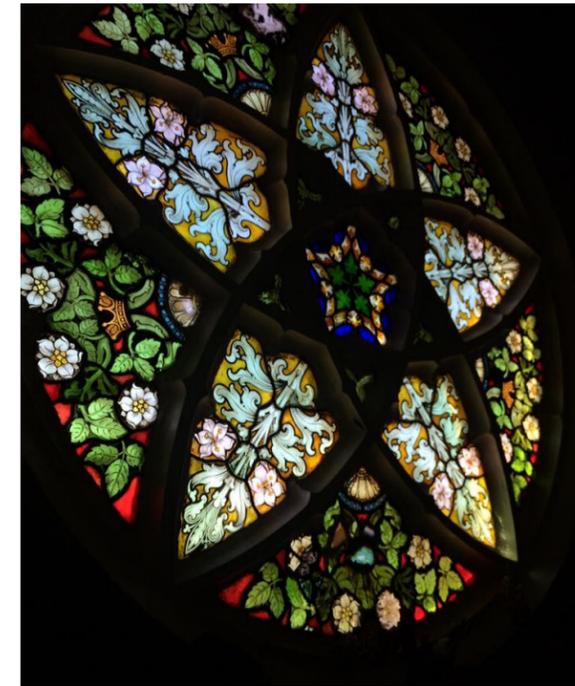
relationship remains undefined - house-taker, RoundTable committee member, friend. So I felt a sense of imposter syndrome, a need to have some “perfect offering” that I was ill equipped to provide.

Which was not out of character: I am a perfectionist, I wrestle with it and constantly. But every time I set foot in the house, it feels like a reminder to come as I am.

That reminder comes in many forms: watching Mary take on leading Mass on Sundays, wrestling with the tension of preserving Catholic identity, while adapting the structure to reflect the values of the house. Or observing Megan teaching yoga on Saturdays, in the dining room or on the roof, to an ever evolving crowd, not blinking as children run in and out around the mats. Or being greeted by a smiling Gregory, on the way to tackle with enthusiasm a litany of chores that would make most people cringe.

The invitation to bring what you can and be who you are is a grounding reminder in a world that can all too often push us to believe that we are not enough. There is beauty in the chaos, the ringing doorbell, the offerings full of cracks.

But that's how the light gets in.



A beautiful photo of the light getting in through Karen House's stained glass window!
 Source: Karen House Community



Haley Shoaf has spent the summer finding new ways to use her vegetable spiralizer while listening to the Hamilton soundtrack on repeat.



Catholic Worker Thought & Action

Voluntary Poverty, Race, and Class

by **Jenny Truax**

Voluntary poverty is expressed in a million ways throughout the Catholic Worker movement. From rural projects developing alternative clothes-washing techniques to urban Catholic Workers who rely on bicycles for transportation to small-town communities that do economic sharing, practices of voluntary poverty tend to be creative experiments in truth.

One of the hallmarks of Catholic Worker philosophy, voluntary poverty is rooted in the early Christian Church practice of possessions being held in common, freeing up individuals to be more available to the community. Dorothy Day said, "We must keep on talking about voluntary poverty, and holy poverty, because it is only if we can consent to strip ourselves that we can put on Christ. It is only if we love poverty that we are going to have the means to help others. If we love poverty we will be free to give up a job, to speak when we feel it would be wrong to be silent. We can only talk about voluntary poverty because we believe Christians must be fools for Christ." The Catholic Worker Aims and Means states that, "By embracing voluntary poverty, that is, by casting our lot freely with those whose impoverishment is not a choice, we would ask for the grace to abandon ourselves to the love of God. It would put us on the path to incarnate the Church's 'preferential option for the poor.'" Many folks consider voluntary poverty to be a sort of spiritual practice, essential to their identities as Catholic Workers.

The deep purpose of voluntary poverty involves forming right relationships towards each other, and toward the planet: sharing what resources we have, and taking only what we need. Voluntary poverty also resists the materialism that pervades our society. It defies the tropes of capitalism that say that we need to produce (whether it is money, volunteer hours or number of meals) to be worthy. It shifts the focus to enable people to be more available to seek justice.

Looking at voluntary poverty through an anti-oppression lens, it's important to acknowledge that presently, the Catholic Worker movement is an almost exclusively white space, and in terms of class, the majority of its members come from middle class backgrounds. Many of my comments will be geared toward folks with these identities, and I welcome feedback on the flaws in this article, which is rooted in my experiences as white,

middle class, long-term Catholic Worker. This is not meant to ignore the people of color who have always been part of the movement, or the poor and working class people who identify as Catholic Workers, rather, it's an attempt to call in folks with similar privileged identities.

I'll start with a few observations from my experience. I have often experienced the practice of voluntary poverty embodying a white savior complex. In our writings on voluntary poverty, we Catholic Workers can often appear messianic, alluding to our steps to save the planet, provide light in the dark, and a voice for the voiceless. The white savior complex manifests when concepts like morality become racialized as identifiable with white people over non-white people. I see this happening when our CW lifestyle of voluntary poverty and the Works of Mercy are considered unique, angelic and fundable. I know many poor folks and people of color doing these same practices who don't receive nearly the same level of recognition or support.

In my experience, the precarity that Dorothy promoted is simply not good for human psychology or for people to live full lives. I believe it feeds into a trope of martyrdom and scarcity that actually feeds into unhealthy patterns and relationships. Precarity keeps us from feeling at home and stable. It prevents us from making goals for ourselves because we are constantly struggling with short term crisis-oriented things. While that quote from Dorothy about "stripping ourselves" above may feel liberating for middle and upper class folks, in my experience, it is disinviting to both people of color and working class folks. For example, when I've talked to guests about voluntary poverty using these quotes, it has often felt more like a wall between us ("You aren't getting health insurance, why?") than a doorway to deeper relationship.

Dorothy Day often stated that by adopting voluntary poverty, "we" (Catholic Workers assumed to not be involuntarily poor) will be able to love better and share a deeper life with the guests. During my time at Karen House, I have never felt like this was deeply honest. In some ways, it propagated this internal myth that I was "the same" as the guests, actually getting in the way of relationship, and ignoring my structural race and class privilege. Many practices of voluntary poverty can feel like volun-tourism, where white, middle class folks spend lots

of time on low-risk, individually-oriented experiments with the latest fads of fermenting, thrift store shopping and biking, and don't seek out developing new skills of communication, conflict, and vulnerability that will help them share a deeper life with others. Having witnessed some powerful connections between guests and volunteers who did not adopt voluntary poverty, I'm not sure that my lifestyle of voluntary poverty actually provided more connection, intimacy, or vulnerability in my relationships with the guests.

Questions Towards Liberation

Some of the root goals of voluntary poverty are creating right relationship, and freeing people to do justice and live their best lives. Within the varying contexts and current demographic of the Catholic Worker, what practices can lead us there? I can offer a few ideas here, which are just a start.

I believe it's essential to promote, welcome, and value different expressions of simple living, resource sharing, sustainability and self care. The "one-size fits all" version of voluntary poverty will inevitably center the experience of people with dominant identities, especially white, middle class people. It may not be liberatory for everyone to swear off eating processed foods, live without a cell phone or to resist student debt loans. If we maintain expectations that only people with class and race privilege are able to meet, we will continue to be a movement of almost all white middle class people. Our CW communities should encourage members to take into account all aspects of dominant and targeted identities, (especially age, race, class, ability, etc.) and to bravely and creatively decide what paths are liberatory. If our community is mostly white or middle class folks, we can ask, "Is our community willing to alter its culture to support working class folks and people of color to live their best lives even when it looks very different from the liberation of middle class white people?"

The economy of the U.S. has always relied on the invention of race and racism to extract labor and resources from communities of color and funnel them towards businesses and organizations that are identified with, and led by, white people. The Catholic Worker is not an exception to this; in fact, the statement issued by the 2017 CW Midwest Faith and Resistance Retreat acknowledged that the Catholic Worker's access to resources and power "indicate less that our work is righteous and more that we live in a world where... white people like to invest their wealth in white-led organizations." Recognizing this reality, white Catholic Workers, and white-dominated CW communities need to ask, "What can we do to return what has been stolen from people of color and Native people?" This is about reparations on both an individual and a community organization level, again, while taking our different identities into account.

Whiteness provides privileged relationships to loans, land, and education. How can our community work to shift money and resources towards organizations led by people of color? How can I as a white person set up sustainable practices that move resources to individual people of color? What material support can I and my community lend to grassroots groups led by people of color (money, child care, errand running, background support)? What could accountability to these groups look like?

In terms of underlying expectations and community culture, we need to examine the ways that the CW practice of voluntary poverty can manifest white supremacy culture; for example, perfectionism, competitiveness, individualism and either-or thinking. (A longer version of this article, found in our the online version of the Round Table on our website, explores this.) We may need to create new language entirely in order to move away from strong ways that our voluntary poverty embodies white supremacy culture. I've heard "radical simplicity" suggested as an alternative.

White-dominated communities need to wrestle with these questions related to whiteness that prevent right relationship. In what ways is our community's presence a manifestation of colonialism? In what ways are we taking resources from the local community or taking resources away from other groups led by people of color? In what ways are we contributing to gentrification by importing white faces into communities of color?

Voluntary poverty is rooted in some powerful intentions. The way that it is currently practiced by a majority white, middle class movement of people manifests some problematic and exclusive tendencies that hijack our work toward equity and justice. I've spent my whole adult life in the Catholic Worker, and hope that we can evolve to become a more inclusive and welcoming space. Unless the Catholic Worker movement reckons with how we preach and practice voluntary poverty, we will remain a space that largely excludes people who aren't white and middle class.



Sources, further reading, and the full version of this article is available for download on our website.



Jenny Truax, now enjoying her 20th year of involvement at Karen House, recently attended Star Wars Celebration where she met 70,000 new best friends.

The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

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Karen House Statement on the Stockley Verdict

One of the chief goals of the Catholic Worker is to labor to create a society where it is “easier to be good.” But when justice doesn’t apply equally to the police, as we saw in the “not guilty” verdict of Jason Stockley, it is harder to be good. When justice doesn’t apply equally to our siblings of color, as we see so often and saw particularly in the murder of Anthony Lamar Smith, it is harder to be good. When an atmosphere of fear and thoughtless deference to the police is fueled by the racism in our justice system, it is harder to be good.

Our current reality calls to mind the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: “These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard.”

We have experienced a very different picture than that painted in the news about the protests: these are not riots, these are protests, and we support the efforts of those who go and stand up for change. We feel the Holy Spirit working to create this large, passionate outpouring of demand for a more justice society, a demand for police accountability, an insistence that black lives matter and must matter – not just among citizens but in the statutes and practices of our justice system. Grace is pouring into the streets, and when we hear calls for order and calm rather than a firm demand for justice, we remember the lament of Dr. King, “I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate.”

Regardless of your thoughts on the tactics of the protesters, the most urgent call to action must center on the police system in which officers can murder with impunity, reinforcing racism and instilling a culture of fear in the black community. We should fight for a society where it is “easier to be good,” not one in which it is easier for the privileged to feel comfortable. We humbly call on the St. Louis community and our friends across the country to join the efforts in whatever way makes the most sense to you. And while the fight for true justice can be demanding, it will always lead to a society where it is “easier to be good.”



Megan and Gregory, Karen House community members, holding a sign at an interfaith prayer vigil for peace a few days after the Stockley Verdict.

Karen House Announcements!

We have an almost full house and are in need of people to help us with meals! If you can, call Megan at 618-722-8880 to:

- 1) Bring a cooked dinner for 25 people
- 2) Regularly drop off gallons of milk and OJ
- 3) Volunteer to help cook Sunday brunch

If you are in St. Louis, check out the new exhibit at the Griot Museum of Black History (2505 St. Louis Avenue) called "Eminent Domain/Displaced." It opens on October 6 and will be there through November 20.

Karen House is supporting the family of Isiah Hammett, who was killed in a no-knock SWAT team raid in June. We ask your support to help Isiah's mother Gina pay for the funeral of her son. For more info and to make a donation, check out their GoFundme page:
<https://www.gofundme.com/3wx1auo>

Check KarenHouseCW.org for updates on Karen House, resources on the Catholic Worker, an archive of past Round Tables, and more! Our website has a HUGE trove of resources on racism, white privilege, and the Black Lives Matter movement!