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The Haves, the Have-nots and the Dreamless Dead

By Emily Kaiser, Reuters

In 2007, when the world was on the brink of financial crisis, U.S. income inequality hit its highest mark since 1928, just before the Great Depression.

Coincidence? Maybe not.

Early findings suggest inequality may not directly cause crises, but it can be a contributing factor.

This raises a host of social, economic and political questions. Should public policy aim to reduce inequality, and if so by what means?

Americans are generally not bothered by inequality because they believe with hard work, they, too, can strike it rich. Government policies aimed at spreading the wealth rarely get much support.

"It is usually only left-leaning rich people that care about inequality in the U.S.," said Carol Graham, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution think tank who studies the economics of happiness.

Those attitudes may be subtly shifting, although it is unclear that this is anything more than just a temporary knee-jerk reaction to the latest bout of turmoil.

Resentment towards Wall Street is simmering as bankers' paychecks swell to pre-crisis levels while unemployment remains more than twice as high as it was in 2007. Some politicians have been voted out of office simply because they supported the \$700 billion bank bailout enacted in 2008.

Yet there is nowhere near majority backing for the sort of progressive New Deal policies passed during the Great Depression, which helped narrow the wealth gap and keep it contained until it resumed widening in the 1970s.

This time around, the wealth disparity narrowed in 2008 because rich households took a heavier hit from the financial crisis, but Census Bureau data shows it turned around immediately. In 2009, inequality was at the highest level since Census began tracking household income in 1967.

America has one of the largest wealth gaps among advanced economies. Based on an inequality measure known as the Gini coefficient, the United States ranks on a par with developing countries such as Ivory Coast, Jamaica and Malaysia, according to the CIA World Factbook.

TRACKING THE DIVIDE

Emmanuel Saez, a University of California, Berkeley, economist who was awarded a 2010 MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant for his work on income inequality, said recession-induced income declines for the super-rich tend to be fleeting unless there are "drastic" regulatory and tax policy changes.

His research with co-author Thomas Piketty shows the top 1 percentile of households took home 23.5 percent of income in 2007, the largest share since 1928, but that slipped back to 20.9 percent in 2008. (Unlike Census, Saez relies on IRS tax data, which is released with a two-year lag, so he does not yet have figures for 2009.)

During the last period of economic expansion, 2002 to 2007, the top 1 percent enjoyed 10.1 percent annual income growth, adjusted for inflation. For the other 99 percent, the growth rate was just 1.3 percent, Saez found. That meant the top 1 percent received 65 cents of every dollar in income growth.

"We need to decide as a society whether this increase in income inequality is efficient and acceptable and, if not, what mix of institutional reforms should be developed to counter it," he concluded.

COMMON THREADS

There is little agreement among economists about what precisely links high inequality to crises, which helps explain why so few officials saw the financial upheaval coming.

Robert Reich, a Berkeley public policy professor and a labour secretary under President Bill Clinton, thinks stagnant middle-class wages led households to pull equity from their homes and overload on debt to maintain living standards.

Raghuram Rajan, a professor at the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business and a former chief economist of the International Monetary Fund, believes governments tend to promote easy credit when inequality spikes to assuage middle-class anger about falling behind.

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Place, Race and Health

By Paula Lomazzi

The Coalition on Regional Equity held a summit in Sacramento on November 5, 2010 'An Outlook on Place, Health and Equity'. Mary Lee of Policy Link was the keynote speaker that discussed why place and race matter in our communities. In this country we have determined that where you live determines your health. We're starting to realize that where you live can also determine your race, especially in California.

In our history of this 'Golden State' there

are far too many examples of racism that have helped shape this state, its policies and systems. Racial violence, brutality, terrorism, and oppression has particularly been targeted towards people of color. Native Americans were pushed off their land, exposed to illnesses and disease, and were subject to cultural annihilation. African Americans were relegated to segregated neighborhoods and to dangerous working conditions. Japanese Americans were forced from their homes and into relocation camps.

These kind of racist attitudes and beliefs will not be spelled out plainly but we will

see the results of racism in land use and zoning.

In communities concentrated with people of color, there are also a deficiency of services such as inadequate transportation, troubled schools, low wage jobs, inadequate healthcare, lack of access to healthy foods, safe streets, recreation and open space. It's an accumulative disadvantage in these neighborhoods and there is a direct impact on the health of those living in these neighborhoods. People

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Students turn trash into tuition

By Kara Santos, IPS

PHILIPPINES: Most people would not think twice about throwing out old plastic bags, empty soda cans, scrap metal and used shampoo bottles. But for the students of Cavite Institute in the Philippines, trash like this has become their ticket out of poverty.

This is because their non-profit private school, located in Silang in Cavite province, some 45 kilometres south of the Philippine capital of Manila, has a scholarship program that allows its 852 students to pay school fees with recyclables instead of cash.

Called WISHCRAFT, which stands for 'We Integrate Scholarship with the Collection of Recyclables and Frequently Generated Trash', the program has enabled students from low-income families to enroll in the school and obtain scholarships and tuition fee discounts.

Arvee Rose Abayabay, a fourth-year high school student, is one of those benefiting from the school's program. Her mother just left for Kuwait to work as a sewer while her father serves in the local council.

"It's a good program for the students because it helps us a lot, especially in paying our tuition fees," says Abayabay, who plans to pursue a degree in nursing or food technology in university. "The program helps both students and the parents transform garbage into money for education while helping the environment."

Elin Mondejar, who conceptualized the WISHCRAFT Program at the Cavite Institute, tells IPS how it works.

"All students who bring in recyclables automatically get a credit equivalent discount on their school fees. The discount may be used by the student or donated to another student in need," says Mondejar.

Students, parents, teachers or individuals who endorse student applicants bring in recyclable items like cartons, paper, plastic, newspapers and glass bottles to a materials recovery facility right beside the school, where the items are then weighed and recorded.

The school partnered with an intermediary, who delivers the recyclables to junk shops and gives the payment collected from these to the school's accounting unit, which then does the corresponding deductions according to the record of recyclables submitted per student.

On average, tuition and other educational and project fees at the Cavite Institute total 30,000 pesos (680 U.S. dollars) a year or more for students, who are from the pre-school to high school level. School officials say that 40 to 50 percent of the students now avail of the discounts, with some paying 25 percent less in tuition fees due to the credits they earn from bringing in recyclable refuse.

The equivalent cost of each recyclable item depends on the type, number and quality of the goods. For instance, copper wire is traded at 150 pesos (3.4 dollars) a kilogram while white paper fetches six pesos (13 cents) a kg.

School principal Corrine Realica adds that students and teachers segregate and clean items before they bring them in, as clean items bring in more money than dirty and un-

sorted ones.

"While most rely on their own household trash, some have branched out to their relatives and neighbors and set up collection centers to go towards their tuition fund," Realica tells IPS. "Even teachers who aren't sending children to school have adopted scholars because they don't want their trash at home to go to waste."

Special education students who are unable to afford school fees have also been supported by corporate sponsorships through WISHCRAFT. Two such students have full scholarships under the multinational consumer goods firm Unilever, which donates proceeds from its recyclable garbage towards the students' tuition.

Realica says the bulk trash donated by the company makes quite a difference because the tuition for special education students costs as much as 50,000 pesos a year (1,140 dollars), an amount way above what low-income families make in a country where 44 percent or over 40 million Filipinos live on less than two dollars a day.

A joint study by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the non-government Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) says that the number of children aged 6-16 who are not attending school rose from 1.8 million in 2002 to 2.2 million in 2007, partly due to the high cost of education.

The WISHCRAFT program, which was pilot-tested in 2002 and launched in 2004, is now considered a best practice for innovation, resourcefulness, cost-effectiveness, replicability and partnerships. There have been various

spin-offs of this program around the country. A farm school uses the same trash-to-cash concept to raise money for teachers' salaries. In a public school where tuition fees are free, recyclables brought in by students are logged and are convertible to school supplies. An out-of-school group set up a theatre group where the entrance fees are recyclables instead of cash.

"There is really money in garbage, and the possibilities are endless," says Mondejar. "It makes students see garbage in a different light."

Mondejar says that the Cavite Institute program benefits students who want better quality education, but cannot afford the tuition fees. The school limits its class size to 25 to 30 students, compared to public schools in the area that can have up to 70 pupils in one classroom.

From 48 scholars in school-year 2002-2003, the number of students having full or partial scholarships or tuition-fee discounts now averages 500 annually.

The program makes two social priorities meet and thrive on each other - keeping youngsters in school and helping clean the environment. "To date over 300 tons of recyclables which could have been disposed of in rivers, canals and highways have been converted to a more worthy cause - education," Mondejar points out.

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Prince William slept rough on the streets of London to experience first-hand what it is like to be homeless. And now he speaks up to support street papers worldwide in this exclusive statement for the StreetNews Service.

By Prince William of Wales

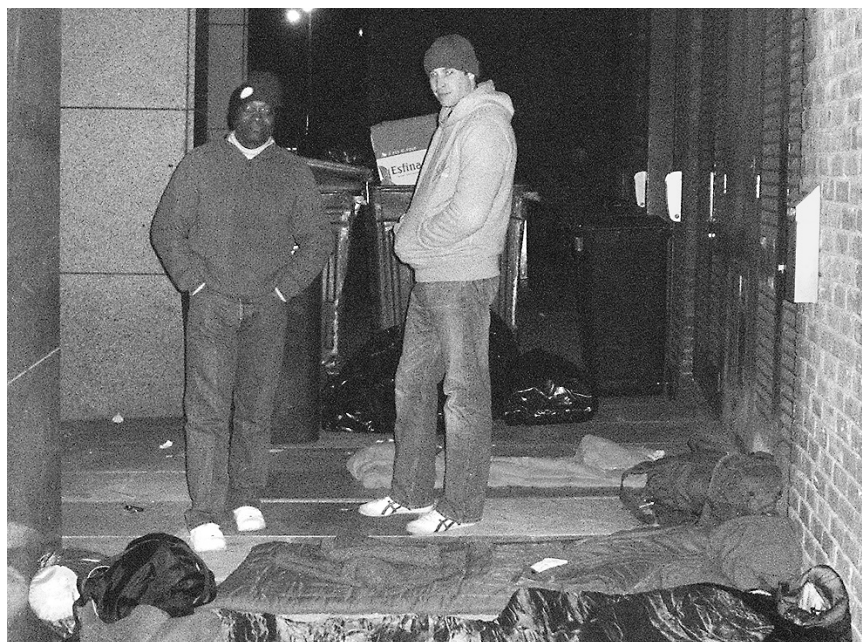
The economic downturn has had a devastating effect on the numbers of homeless rough sleepers in our communities. In London alone, rough sleeping has risen by almost a quarter in just two years, and that figure does not even include those who have been forced out of their homes into temporary accommodation or overcrowded housing.

There are many reasons why someone can find themselves homeless: family breakdown, unemployment, drug or alcohol abuse, or falling on desperately hard times, often through no fault of their own. But the effect of homelessness is the same for everyone: a crushing sense of hopelessness and despair. The emotional consequences for the individual can be utterly devastating - sometimes more so than the stark fact of being homeless.

Charities, churches, governments and other bodies can all help with the basics - a roof under which to shelter from the elements, heating and security - but without hope, an individual cannot rebuild a life. And for there to be people with no hope living right alongside us is surely a blight on our societies.

That is why the work of the restorers of hope - street newspapers, my own charity Centrepont and other organizations and individuals who care - so inspire me. They give homeless people the tools with which to rebuild their confidence and, ultimately, their lives.

I have met many homeless young people who are now filled with a passion and desire to achieve in life, simply because they were given a little support at the right time to get back on their feet. These are people of extraordinary courage. There can be a perception that they have given up and lack courage. Let me tell you, they have not and they do not. I count myself enormously privileged to be associated with such individuals. I salute all the organizations that are there for them.



Britain's Prince William (R) and Seyi Obakin, CEO for the Centrepont charity for homeless people, stand near Blackfriars Bridge in London in this December 15, 2009 photograph made available in London on December 22, 2009. Both Prince William and Seyi Obakin slept rough for the night, after the charity organised the opportunity for the Prince to experience a night sleeping on the streets. Photo: REUTERS/Centrepont/Handout

Construction Competition Builds 25,000 Pounds of Food for the Greater Boston Food Bank

By Adam Sennott
Spare Change News

BOSTON: Bunker Hill Community College hosted the 15th annual Construction Design and Build Competition, in which architecture and design firms build giant structures out of canned goods. There were twelve structures in this year's competition. All of the canned food was purchased from Shaw's supermarket, and was later donated to the Greater Boston Food Bank.

According to their website, Construction is a non-profit organization which holds design competitions all over the world. The goal of each competition is to inspire communities to work together while raising food to feed the hungry.

Along with Bunker Hill Community College, other Construction events have been held as far away as Melbourne, Australia and Christ Church, New Zealand.

This is the third straight year Bunker Hill Community College has hosted the Boston Construction Competition. This year's event was themed "HUNGER is NO LAUGHING MATTER." The goal of this year's theme was to stress the seriousness of hunger, while also keeping the competition humorous.

"I thought the suggestion of a humor theme could generate some interesting visual imagery," said Laura Montgomery, head of the Bunker Hill Community College Art Gallery. "And I thought perhaps if we had some well known comics, representations of them, that could get up more attention and spotlight the local issue of hunger, which is pretty severe."

"We've got Garfield lifted from the comic, there's the penniless clown, Mr. Potato Head," said Montgomery. "There's a large chicken down on the first floor, you know, the proverbial oldest joke in the book, why did the chicken cross the road?"

"There's a chair with a Whoopee cushion, which is one of my April Fool's favorites. There's a Charlie Brown and Snoopy, there's revisiting of the Mooninite bomb scare."

"Then of course there's [Conan] O'Brien upstairs, who was legally prohibited from being funny all of last year," said Montgomery. "He's going to return to the air-waves, and we're kind of hoping he'll maybe give us a little shout out."

While thousands of cans go into each sculpture, building them doesn't take very long as the architecture and design firms map out the placement of each can well beforehand.

"It's a pretty quick process because they pretty much know where each and every can is going," said Montgomery. "It's all done by computer assisted design. Well before hand they work up schematics, they know exactly how much food to order, what color cans,

which products are in the cans that are going to yield the greatest nutrition."

Although the designers may have had each structure mapped out well in advance, they still had no trouble finding ways to put the students at Bunker Hill Community College to work.

"We've got students from our Community Service Engagement Program that helped out during the build out," said Montgomery. "Some of them also helped out with the sorting of the food at the Shaw's warehouse."

"Some of my art gallery interns and work study students helped during the build out, and helped monitor the sculptures to make sure that they were sound, and that there's no threat of them falling over."

Although the architecture and design firms put a lot of work into constructing the sculptures and the students helped them ensure the structures were stable, they still had to come down at some point. At the end of the competition, the structures were disassembled and donated to the Greater Boston Food Bank.

"It's extremely important, especially in this challenging climate we're all living in right now," said Cheryl Blanton, Product Donations Manager for the Greater Boston Food Bank.

"This donation of product is extremely important. We are distributing to over 500 different agencies, soup kitchens, pantries, and shelters, and the need is up dramatically"

According to their website, the Greater Boston Food Bank is the country's oldest hunger-relief organization, and feeds more than 394,000 people throughout eastern Massachusetts.

Spare Change News
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World Comparison Shows U.S. Healthcare Lacking

By Maggie Fox, Reuters

A third of Americans say they have gone without medical care or skipped filling a prescription because of cost, compared to 5 percent in the Netherlands, according to a study released in November. The study is the latest in a series by the non-profit Commonwealth Fund showing that while Americans pay far more per capita for healthcare, they are unhappier with the results and less healthy than people in other rich countries.

The study published in the journal Health Affairs also showed that 20 percent of U.S. adults had major problems paying medical bills, compared with 2 percent in Britain and 9 percent in France, the next costliest country.

"U.S. adults were the most likely to incur high medical expenses, even when insured, and to spend time on insurance paperwork and disputes or to have payments denied," the report reads.

The Commonwealth Fund, which advocates for U.S. healthcare reform, commissioned a Harris Interactive poll of nearly 20,000 people in 11 countries between March and June, 2010.

"What we are hearing directly from adults around the world, and what we hear regularly at home, is that there is substantial room for improvement in the U.S. health insurance system," said Commonwealth Fund President Karen Davis.

Healthcare reform was U.S. Presi-

dent Barack Obama's signature policy effort, but not a single Republican voted for the bill that Obama signed into law this year and conservatives in Congress have promised to try to dismantle it.

The new law is meant to address some of the weaknesses in the U.S. system by forcing more Americans to buy health insurance, expanding public insurance and preventing insurers from dropping coverage.

About 60 percent of Americans under 65 get health insurance through an employer -- about 157 million adults. Health insurers include WellPoint, Aetna Inc, Cigna Corp, Humana Inc, UnitedHealth Group Inc, Health Net Inc, Amerigroup Corp and the Blue Cross Blue Shield network.

Roughly 45 million people 65 and older have coverage through the nation's Medicare program for the elderly and disabled. The system leaves 47 million without any health insurance, and last week the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that 59 million Americans had no insurance for at least some of the beginning of 2010.

The 10 other countries in the survey -- Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland -- all provide a mix of public and private insurance.

Adults in Britain, Switzerland, New Zealand and the Netherlands were the most likely to be able to get to a doctor the same day or next day when they needed to, the survey found.

More than 90 percent of Swiss adults said they could see a doctor that fast, compared with 57 percent of adults in Sweden and the United States, and fewer than half in Canada and Norway.

Only 70 percent of adults in the United States or Norway said they were confident they would get the most effective treatment if ill, compared with 90 percent of Britons and 89 percent of the Swiss.

"The United States is the only country in which one-fifth of adults reported serious problems paying health care bills," the study adds.

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Can Construction - Mr. "Potato Head"?

Dreamless Dead

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"One way to paper over the rising inequality was to lend so that people could spend," Rajan said.

In the 1920s, it was expansion of farm credit, instalment loans and home mortgages. In the last decade, it was leveraged borrowing and lending, by home buyers who put no money down or investment banks that lent out \$30 for each \$1 held.

"Housing credit gave you an instrument to assist those falling behind without them feeling they're beneficiaries of some sort of subsidy," Rajan said. "Even if their incomes are stagnant, they feel really good about becoming homeowners."

BUBBLES AND YACHTS

Another theory is that concentration of wealth at the top sends investors searching for riskier interest-bearing savings. When so much cash is sloshing around, traditional safe investments such as Treasury debt yield very little, and wealthy investors may seek out fatter returns elsewhere.

Mark Thoma, who teaches economics at the University of Oregon, wonders if the flood of investment cash from the ultra-rich -- both in the United States and abroad -- encouraged Wall Street to create seemingly safe mortgage-backed securities that later proved disastrously risky.

"When we see income inequality rising, we ought to start looking for bubbles," he said.

Kemal Dervis, global economy and development division director at Brookings and a former economy minister for Turkey, said reducing inequality isn't just a matter of fairness or morality. An economy based on consumption needs consumers, and if too much wealth is concentrated at the top there may be times when there is not enough demand to support growth.

"There may be demand for private jets and yachts, but you need a healthy middle-income group (to drive consumption of basic goods)," he said. "In the golden age of capitalism, in the 1950s and 60s, everyone shared in income growth."

MISSING THE LINK

Paul Krugman, the Nobel prize-winning economist, said that before 2008, when he spoke of inequality approaching levels last seen before the Great Depression, it would inevitably lead to questions about whether another crisis was looming.

"No, I'd say -- there really isn't a clear reason why high inequality should lead to macroeconomic crisis," he recalled in a presentation to a conference on income inequality in June.

Krugman certainly wasn't the only one who dismissed the idea of a connection between inequality and crisis before the latest episode.

Ajay Kapur, a Deutsche Bank strategist, spotted the inequality parallels between the 1920s and the most recent decade, but didn't see the meltdown coming. The former Citigroup strategist created a stir five years ago when he built an investment strategy around his thesis that essentially divided the world into two

camp: the rich and the rest.

Kapur told clients in 2005 that the United States and a handful of other economies were developing into "plutonomies" where the wealthy few powered economic growth and consumed much of its bounty, while the "multitudinous many" shared the leftovers.

Plutonomies come around only once or twice a century, he argued -- 16th century Spain, 17th century Holland, the Gilded Age. The last time it happened in the United States was during the "Roaring 1920s".

There was money to be made by buying shares of luxury companies that made toys for the rich, he told clients.

"When I presented this to clients, they said, 'Okay, this is interesting because you're telling me what happened in the 1920s is happening right now, and you obviously know what happened after 1929, right?'" Kapur said in an interview.

His response? That can't happen again because we know better now.

SEEDS OF INEQUALITY

Inequality doesn't always lead to financial crisis, which makes it difficult for policymakers to know when it might be growing into a serious problem that ought to be addressed.

The traditional view among economists is that combating inequality would hurt growth. Many argue that inequality is "if anything, favourable to -- or at least a necessary by-product of -- economic growth," as Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas researchers wrote in a 2008 paper on inequality.

In the decades before the Great Depression, advances in mass-production and transportation enabled large-scale factories to churn out more goods with fewer workers.

In the past two decades, the big change was the explosion of personal computing and the Internet. The ability to instantaneously transmit masses of information over thousands of miles meant workers no longer needed to be in the same place, and jobs could easily shift to low-cost locales such as Bangalore, India, or Shenzhen, China.

Demand for unskilled labour fell. The relatively small segment of the population with the qualifications to compete -- in the 1920s, a high school diploma; in today's economy, a college degree -- earned more money, widening the wealth gap.

Unemployment data bears that out. Even before the latest recession started in late 2007, the jobless rate for those with only a high school diploma was more than double the rate for those with at least a Bachelor's degree. As of September 2010, unemployment among high school graduates was 10 percent; for those with a four-year college degree it was just 4.4 percent.

This suggests one government response to inequality should be to channel more money into education, said Jack Ablin, chief investment adviser for Harris Private Bank in Chicago.

I CAN BE BILL GATES

The work hard, get rich formula is deeply embedded in the American psyche, which helps explain why Americans have generally tolerated inequality.

For every dynastic family name such as Kennedy or Rockefeller, there are those who reached the top through creativity and sweat, from Sam Walton who built the global Walmart empire from a single dime store in Arkansas, to Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin who started their company in a garage.

Rags to riches tales are an integral part of what makes the United States a beacon to immigrants who dream of a better life. No one embodies that better than President Obama, whose mother once turned to food stamps to feed her family, yet he was able to attend top-tier universities and aspire to the most powerful office in the world.

Graham, the Brookings economist who studies happiness, said most Americans, including the poor, believe that hard work is more important than luck in getting ahead.

"If I work hard enough, I too can be Bill Gates," is how Graham explains the philosophy.

The only groups that don't share that view and consistently rank towards the bottom on measures of happiness are the long-term unemployed and those without health care, she said.

Both groups grew during the recession. As of September, there were 6.1 million people who had been out of work for more than six months, more than four times as many as there were at the start of the recession.

Deborah Coleman is one of the long-term unemployed. There is no disguising the anger felt by the 58-year-old former telecommunications company manager in Cincinnati, who has been out of work for more than two years.

"Am I pissed that I have lost everything while the rich on Wall Street are still living it up? You bet I'm pissed," she said. "I'm one of the many people who've lost everything and then been swept under the carpet."

DREAMLESS DEAD

Like cholesterol, there is a "good" and a "bad" kind of inequality, according to Francois Facchini, an economist at the University of Paris.

The "good" kind is aspirational. It encourages people to strive towards success, like Graham's Bill Gates analogy. The "bad" kind fosters disillusionment, a feeling that no matter how hard you work, you cannot win.

Pollster John Zogby sees a growing number of Americans falling into the second category. He calls them the "Dreamless Dead," those who no longer believe in the existence of the American Dream of hard work begetting success.

Those who work hard but fail to get ahead lose faith in the dream, he said. Beginning in the 1990s, Zogby noticed an increase in

the percentage of people who said they were working in jobs that paid less than previous positions.

In the early 1990s, 14 percent of those polled by Zogby said they were making less money than they had before. After the recession, the percentage had more than doubled.

Janet Townsend, who has worked at General Motors for 34 years, is one of those faced with the prospect of a drastic pay cut. She was told she'd have to take a 50 percent wage reduction because GM wanted to sell the Indianapolis plant where she works to a private investor. Union workers opposed the deal.

"I haven't seen any auto executives or Wall Street bankers taking a paycut, in fact their pay seems to keep going up," she said. "This country is built on the principles of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

"But when a corporation tries to make me take a 50 percent pay cut, then you're taking away my right to pursue happiness while enhancing your own."

A NEWCOMER TO WASHINGTON

If inequality can lead to financial catastrophe and voter outrage, should Washington try to stop it from getting too wide?

Obama's avoidance of spread-the-wealth comments would indicate the White House does not think there is political backing for policies aimed explicitly at redistribution.

However, at least one new arrival to Washington's policy-making scene, Fed Vice Chairman Janet Yellen, has expressed concern that extreme inequality could ultimately undermine American democracy.

"Inequality has risen to the point that it seems to me worthwhile for the U.S. to seriously consider taking the risk of making our economy more rewarding for more of the people," she wrote in a 2006 speech.

The public policy response depends on what the root problem really is. Thoma, the University of Oregon economist, said it still isn't clear whether bubbles cause inequality or inequality causes bubbles.

If it is the former, Yellen and the Fed could play a role in preventing disaster by raising interest rates or tightening regulation when they see evidence of a dangerous asset price bubble building.

If inequality is the core issue, more progressive taxes or investing in education programs might be more effective.

ON AVERAGE, YOU'RE DOING OKAY

Before policymakers can act, they will need to get better at identifying unsafe imbalances.

Willard Wirtz, who was President John F. Kennedy's labour secretary in the 1960s, is often credited with saying: "When you have your head in the freezer and your feet in the oven, on average you are doing okay."

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Race and Health

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of color suffer disproportionately from conditions that not only shorten their lives, but compromise their quality of life. They are more likely to suffer from heart disease, stroke, cancer or asthma and are also more likely to be impacted by violence or hit by a car on the streets. National health policies mostly focus on medical care and greatly neglect focusing on the quality of neighborhoods. Though medical care is also very important in treating diseases, environmental changes in the places where they live will have a bigger impact on health in low-income neighborhoods.

There are four basic types of environments that are looked at when examining this problem--Economic, Social, Physical and Service environments. Relationship of family, culture, and tradition are often strong in neighborhoods with negative economic, physical and service environments. In these communities, most will want to stay and improve their communities instead of leaving. The people are their asset no matter how disadvantaged. They believe in a possibility and potential which improves the chances for change and revitalizing these communities.

When you look at the problem of obesity, the solutions of moving more and eating better are harder in communities of color. In their physical environment, there's a huge racial disparity in parks, open spaces and recreation, and maintenance is lacking. Recreational programs also prevent violence, crime and blight. Without these attributes, property values drop and commercial development is less likely to come. Neighborhoods without parks are also usually lacking other alternatives. School playgrounds are less maintained and after school programs are often lacking. Joint use agreements could help maximize resources, and help address these disparities but that would only be a temporary approach and doesn't

address the lack of park space.

Looking at obesity and food access, low-income and communities of color have less access to food options. Access to healthy foods means access to supermarkets, farmers markets, community supported agriculture, community gardens and produce stands. But our food systems often conspire against this. Sometimes zoning codes prohibit those choices and often there's a racialized component to the decision making. Supermarkets are often fewer and when they do exist, products are inferior, choices are limited and prices are higher, even within the same chains. People can drive longer distances for better access, but using more transportation costs. "Convenient" and liquor stores, where you buy more highly processed, high sugar and salt foods that hurt your health, become the most available and affordable options. Even in rural communities, locally grown food is shipped off to long distances, then food is shipped back and sold at very high prices with more limited variety. People living in poorer neighborhoods or in communities of color have lives that become more complicated than they have to be, and more expensive.

Policy changes are needed. We need to dismantle discriminatory policies. Though difficult, we need to look for opportunities to innovate and create approaches that intentionally reverse or eliminate structural racism. We need increased political power of people of color, who become actively engaged and leading the efforts. Public opinion needs to be shifted. We need to work in the actual places that need the change. The Coalition on Regional Equity is working on much of this and their actual mission is to promote a sustainable Sacramento Region that enhances the health of lower income neighborhoods and communities of color. For more information visit their website at www.equitycoalition.org

Distributor Profile



Robert Ragan

This paper is really a life saver for my family and myself. We do this paper every day. Without this paper we have a hard time making it. It helps pay our rent and our utilities and takes care of my family. Without this paper we'd be in major trouble. The paper's all by donation only and it is a job that's given to those of us that want to work. So we go out and distribute the paper and its definitely not panhandling. As I said, it's our job. And its how those of us who wear the badge take care of our family.

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Steve Landefeld, director of the Bureau of Economic Analysis which produces thousands of reports including GDP, has proposed adding more data series that might serve as an early warning system that imbalances were building.

One bright red flag that policymakers seem to have missed pre-crisis was the disconnect between swiftly rising house prices and stagnant wages for most middle-class workers.

TESTING SOCIAL COHESION

In the next five years, the government debt burden may reach a critical point where it is growing at a faster rate than the economy, pushing up taxes and diverting money that could be spent more productively on research or education.

Credit rating agency Moody's has warned that the budgetary decisions facing the United States and many other rich countries may "test social cohesion."

"Will society accept the measures that need to be taken to stabilise the debt position of the government?" Moody's analyst Steven Hess said in an interview.

"Economic growth is not going to get the country out of the negative debt trajectory it now faces," he said.

Hess said he did not expect the sort of riots and protests that have marked austerity pushes in Greece and other parts of Europe, but said inequality can heighten social tension.

Kapur, the strategist behind the plutonomy thesis, said the forces that put the United States into his plutonomy category appear to have peaked, and he has shifted his investment focus to emerging markets where returns look sweeter.

"Perhaps one reason that societies allow plutonomy is because enough of the electorate believe they have a chance of becoming a Pluto-participant," he wrote back then.

"Why kill it off if you can join it? In a sense, this is the embodiment of the 'American Dream'. But if voters feel they cannot participate, they are more likely to divide up the wealth pie, rather than aspire to be truly rich."

Edited for Length © Reuters
www.streetnewsservice.org

THE LAST GENERATION OF CONSUMERISTS

www.chongonation.com

by the homeless science writer,

Chongo

Ordinarily, this, the winter edition of Homeward, has no science article. This is because it rains in the winter and newspaper circulation can slow. This, however, is the first edition to follow the midterm elections, and the political changes that occurred as a consequence of this last election will have a definite impact upon the current subject of the current series of science articles, namely climate change, so there's a science article this winter; especially since addressing climate change was not addressed in any real way as an important issue by any mainstream political party in this election (to be precise, and in all seriousness, not since the presidential election of 2000 was the last time it genuinely was), in any way at all - at least not knowingly.

Although apparently to a lesser extent here in California as we voted slightly differently than most of the rest of the country did, the issue that was clearly paramount on the mind of the voters throughout the country (and still, even here) was the extending of the Bush tax cuts to the wealthy for at least another two years, so that the unemployed get another six months before many of them have no income at all, once their benefits exhaust the these six months. To get another six months, the price might be extending tax cuts for the wealthy indefinitely, and of course trillions of dollars more debt for the future.

Extending the tax cuts for the wealthy will increase the deficit already huge deficit by nearly a trillion dollars (which is about three thousand dollars each, for every last man, woman, and child in America). Extending unemployment benefits for six months, of course, will cost only a fraction of that, while providing a scapegoat for removing the blame for a huge deficit from the wealthy, and placing it upon the poor instead, as has been done in blaming the new health care bill for the rising deficit instead of the Bush tax cuts. We spend on two wars yet refuse to guarantee that all Americans have health care. While massive tax cuts are extended to 'all' Americans, many Americans are ex-

cluded from health care except for charities financed by the wealthy.

Beyond the preference of the voting public to protect the economic power for the wealthy and in large part oppose a national system of universal health care for all, there are (among so many) two other factors that recent political changes will leave wholly unchanged and as a consequence, directly influence human impact upon Earth's climate and ecosystems.

The first of these two factors is that the reduced financial regulation characterized by the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, a law that was an outcome of the great depression, and a law that would have prevented the abuses that led to this current recession, will continue as before. Hence, wealthier people will become wealthier, while progressively more people will become poor and destitute.

The second factor affecting our future effect upon the environment is that Americans will become progressively less educated, just as they have been doing already for decades now. We are among the lowest among industrialized nations. And, as Americans become less educated, the more easily their vote is influenced by unregulated power of the corporation, which is why corporate interests are served by this fact. Moreover, the political needle generally moves to the right with respect to political liberty (i.e. the capacity to make political innovation) as a nation becomes less educated. The rise of the right-wing, conservative Tea Party's impact upon the last election demonstrates this fact.

The best example of the consequences of unregulated, free market economies is the classic third-world dictatorship. In the third world, government is often monopolized by a wealthy, ruling class that numbers very few. This small group of people rule the government, and hence, in this way, rule everyone else according to rules that best serve them. Letting business regulate itself eventually leads to business regulating the regulator itself, that is, gaining progressively more control over the regulator, it ultimately being the government.

So what does the fact that a great number of Americans, very possibly the majority, care more about not taxing the wealthy than the crippling of health care services for the children of the poor have to do with global climate catastrophe? How can a popular choice for slow, worldwide economic collapse, or the diminished education levels of the voting public and corresponding enormous empowerment of corporations to determine how this voting public votes, impact the titanic collapse of entire ecosystems (half the forests of the world have been felled and are gone), everywhere across our fragile planet, that is happening right now, in fact, happening as the reader reads these very words? Why will the slow transformation of the American system into a third world one affect worldwide climate. The answer is simple.

In an economy based upon a short-sighted markets and other immediate business interests, interests that thrive only as a consequence of constantly increasing consumption of diminishing and irreplaceable resources along with the capacity to process the discard, limitation upon increased consumption and its resultant pollution works in contradiction to the market and business goals, unless limitation itself is legislated as being a commodity, instead of a non-market entity.

Keeping things as they are, unchanging, is, of course, the course that the corporations controlling the media seem to be orchestrating. This is because markets and business interests thriving as a consequence ever-increasing consumption and the corresponding pollution it creates means that these corporations have the capital resources to convince a progressively less educated public and hence more easily convinced public that it need only consume more, and the world - particularly the consumer's - will be a better place for it. Needless to say, this notion will ultimately demonstrate itself as being incorrect, since it ignores climate change and the consequences that such change means. Yet, despite the what seems to be a clear lack of concern for the climate, and for the poor, we nonetheless, in an avarice for wealth that is changing our na-

tion into third-world consuming capacity, our economy is failing, we are forced to consume less, and in the process, give the climate a slight reprieve from our indulgence, as third world people consume one tenth what an American does. From the point of view of the environment, America becoming third-world may be salvation.

For the most part, the voting public seems to ignore (at least when they vote) the serious consequences of climate change. This is evidenced by the general lack of mention of the subject anywhere in the public arena or media, and even less mention of the grave outcomes if it is ignored. Again, climate change is not a nice story, but because it is a story that might have irreversible consequences, it is very necessary to tell it. Unfortunately, telling it makes poor business sense - which is, of course, is why the reader finds it being told in a publication distributed by homeless people, rather than a newspaper owned by some huge, autonomous corporation.

(This text is from no science book that Chongo has ever written. However, to see the books that Chongo has written on nature [on physical science] - in collaboration with Jose - go to the web site chongonation.com, which is a web site dedicated to educating those who have least opportunity for learning the scientific foundations that describe nature more accurately than any other body of ideas ever conceived. Chongonation.com provides books that allow such opportunity, in lay terms, and most significantly, without any math whatsoever. Simply go to the www.chongonation.com home page and click on either 'Books on Nature' [Conceptual Physics] or 'Products & Prices' to see just how many books are available. To see the other science essays that Chongo has written, simply click on 'articles' or 'science articles'. To see links to science videos, click first on "Free Education" from the home page.)

El Sagrado Sacramento

Legend has it that when the first Spanish Explorers tasted the water of the Sacramento River they found it so fresh and sweet that they compared it with the sacred wine of the sacrament.

Today hundreds of Sacramentans live along the river and are arrested for camping outside, even though they have nowhere else to go. A group of activist homeless leaders have established "Safe Ground Sacramento," a campaign to end the arrests and also to maintain drug-free, nonviolent self-organized and self-governed communities where people can sleep safely and face the police together.

whose is this

valley where we live and love
valley that was once
a yellow glacial sea

whose is this

sacred river of the sacrament
blessed Sacramento
where we drink so deep

let's reclaim it

for the elk who once drifted
migrating through the tules
in the fog

for the peoples

who planted their villages
in season under oak, east and west
Maidu and Miwok

our paths here

time worn into the soil
criss-crossing trails
like geese when the night is clear

migrating

from the late night greyhound
our footprints on twelfth street
invisible as the tracks of tears

let's reclaim our California

so drought struck
so poisoned
so needing of gardens and care

all is rhymically shifting

we live it
we love it
let's claim it

el sagrado sacramento

going back and back
millennia, millennia
this is our ground
— our safe and sacred ground!

Cathleen Williams 2010

A Letter of Hope, Thanksgiving, and Blessings

Hello All,

I am writing in hopes to share what has happened to my life and in the hope of sharing it will help encourage others not to give up.

I became homeless in January 2010 in Sacramento. I asked a guard at the Grayhound bus station where to get a cheap hamburger, and this was the start of the upward climb. After telling me where to get some food, the man asked me if I had a place to lay down, and told me that if I would come back after eating that he would see if he could help me.

So when I got back he had a bed for me at the Union Gospel Mission where I received a hot meal, a shower and a warm, dry bed. After spending the night at the mission I was given more information that led me to Loaves & fishes for coffee and food complete with services - free phone, library, lots of information on how to make it on the street... What a Blessing it is to have places like this.

I stayed at the Union Gospel Mission until I got my chance to get into the Salvation Army Program. It wasn't easy to get into this program, I went there every day at noon and waited till my number came up - it took two months.

While I was there one of the other groups that came into my life was Sacramento Self-Help Housing. They work with the Salvation Army in helping the homeless find housing that they can afford, and that is how I got my new apartment in West Sacramento - I have been in it for 8 months.

I am getting ready to start my third semester at American River College, and I am doing really well with my grades. It has been 32 years since I was in High School - you see it is never to late. My highest grade in high school was a C and now my highest is an A and the lowest is a C. This blessing came through a lady at Francis House. I went there just about every day to look for work. They have a career center there and also will help with other things. I also have a job....and it is a job that lets me help others.

So after a few months of doing the foot work and praying and asking for help, God answered. I have been Blessed in so many ways so please don't give up. I too was lost, and if I would have given up on Hope, then none of this could have happened.

I want to thank all of the people that God has sent my way that made a difference in my life - and for the ones in the background that you never see and never know about - you know, the ones that work in the kitchen, laundry, clean the showers, fix the broken things... God Bless all of you... and all of you are in my prayers.

Love Always

Jeffrey Sevier
(Some know me as Oklahoma)

Gift Giving

*Involved no fatigue or shopping spree
a gift without a price tag.
Requires no box or fancy ribbon,
comes without postage or jet lag.*

*A friendly hand-shake, an act of kindness,
gift giving from the heart
reminding us of the meaning of Christmas
and for the New Year a beautiful start.*

Lenore Mathews 2009

Yes!

I want to see **HOMEWARD**,
a newspaper produced by homeless people, expand in Sacramento.
Enclosed find my donation of \$15 for a one year subscription.
Please mail my copies to:

Name: _____

Street & Apt: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Make checks payable to the Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee (SHOC)
and mail to: PO Box 952 Sacramento, CA 95812

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Office Use Only

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clip & mail coupon

HOMELESS RESOURCES**Night Shelters**

Salvation Army: 12th and North B St. 30 days per year: Dormitory living, C&S: Dinner, breakfast clothing for residents: Men/Women: Sign-up SA patio weekdays at 1PM. 442-0331

St. John's Shelter: Women and Children. 4410 Power Inn Rd. Call between 10am & 3pm for space availability. 453-1482

Union Gospel Mission: 400 Bannon St. Beds for Men Only, sign up 6:30pm at mission, Newcomers/Referrals have priority. 7:30pm Chapel Service with meal afterwards, 6am breakfast for residents. Showers / shaves 9-11am & 1-2:45pm. open to all homeless men: 447-3268

SAEHC, Sacramento Area Emergency Housing Center: 4516 Parker Ave. 24 hrs: Family Shelter: Families, single adults with children who have no other resource: Women's Refuge, single women, no children: Call for screening/space availability 455-2160

Day Shelters

Friendship Park: 12th St. & North C: Weekdays 7am - 2:30pm: open to anyone: Many services

Meals

Union Gospel Mission: 400 Bannon St.: 7 days, Evening meal, Men/Women: Church service 7:00pm required, dinner following 8:30-9:15pm. Sunday 11am service, lunch at noon. 447-3268

Loaves & Fishes: 1321 No. C St.: Lunch every day 11:30am-1pm. Tickets available 7 am- 12:30 pm at Friendship Park weekdays: at 8 am on Saturday and 10am on Sundays.

Women's Civic Improvement Center: Seniors Only: 3555 3rd Ave. 11:30-12:30 lunch M-F 452-2866

Helping Hands: 3526 5th Ave. Sundays, 8-11 breakfast, sack lunch, clothing

Food-not-Bombs: serves free food in Cesar Chavez Plaza, 9th & J St., every Sunday 1:30 pm. All Welcome.

Women & Children

Maryhouse: 1321 No. C St. suite 32: Breakfast for Women and children 8am-9am. Day shelter 8am-3pm weekdays for women and families.

Wellspring 3414 4th St.: T&Th full breakfast: M-W-F continental breakfast for women and children. 454-9688

also see Wind in Youth Services for young adults

Free Clothing

Sacramento Food Bank: 3333 3rd Ave. (at Broadway) 10am-2pm Mon - Fri. 456-1980

Union Gospel Mission: 400 Bannon St. Men: M-Sat 9-11am or 1-2:45pm: Women and Children: Wed. only. Call for appointment to go in at 11am, 1 or 1:30pm, or attend Bible study at 9:15am and get clothing at 10am 447-3268

Medical

Mercy Clinic: For homeless adults, children: Nurse's office in Friendship park 7:30am & 12:30pm. 446-3345

Sacramento Dental Clinic: 4600 Broadway (Primary Care Bldg) Walk-ins 8 am - 12:30 pm 874-8300

Mental Health

Guest House, 1400 N. A St.: Homeless Mental Health Clinic, M,W,Th,Fri., 8-11:30am Tues 8-11:30am only. Mental Health evaluation, medication if needed. Housing referrals for mentally ill, GA refs, SSI aps, refs to A & D counseling: 443-6972

TLCS Intake Offices: 1400 N. A St. Bldg. A; Adults 18 yrs & up; Referrals to transitional living programs, independent living, mental health support services; SSI/SSDI application assistance; Walk-ins 8-11am M-F 440-1500

Genesis: Professional Counseling for life problems. Referrals. Next to Friendship Park gate. 699-1536

Youth Services

Diogenes: youth 16-21 yrs old. Hot Line call 1-800-339-7177

Wind Youth Center: 701 Dixie Ave. Serves youth ages 12-20. Breakfast and Lunch; Clothing; Laundry and Showers; Case Management. Drop-in Hours: M-F from 8:00am to 4:30pm and Sat 10am to 2pm. 443-8333

Crisis Intervention

WEAVE: Services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and their children. Referrals to court mandated battery intervention programs, Safe house, 24 hr. crisis line: 920-2952

Sacramento Mental Health Center (County): 2150 Stockton Blvd (at T St.) 24hr. Will evaluate anyone for voluntary or involuntary psychiatric care due to danger to self or others. In-patient care facility, drop-in. 732-3637

AIDS / HIV

AIDS Housing Alliance provides residential care, transitional housing & permanent housing services to homeless persons living with aids. 329-1093 weekdays.

CARES (Center for AIDS Research, Education and Service): 1500 21st ST. Serves people with HIV and AIDS. Medical care, mental health, case mgmt, health ed and regional prevention/ed classes. 443-3299

Breaking Barriers: Homeless Outreach Program provides direct services to people living with AIDS and HIV. Transportation to social services, medical appointments, job interviews, and housing assistance. 447-2437

Harm Reduction Services: 3640 40th St.; High risk outreach; HIV, Hep-C testing; case management for HIV; free medical clinic, needle exchange. 456-4849

Alternative Test Site: Free anonymous testing, Wed /Thurs. Call for appt. 874-7720.

Legal Aid

Disability Rights, CA: Free legal services for people with disabilities. Call for appt. toll free: TTY:(800)776-5746

Tommy Clinkenbeard Legal Clinic: 401 12th St. (DeLaney Center) Free legal assistance and advocacy for problems related to homelessness. 446-0368

Legal Services of Northern California, Inc: 515 12th St. (at E ST.) M-F 8:30am-12pm, 1pm-5pm. Problems with public benefits, landlord / tenant, divorce clinic. Call for appt. 551-2150

Welfare Rights: 1901 Alhambra Blvd. (2nd floor) M-F 9am-5pm: AFDC, Food Stamps, Workfare and Medical rep at hearings. 736-0616

Miscellaneous

Francis House: 1422 C st. 9:30-11:30 am M-W & 1-3 pm M-F: walk-in or referral providing resource counseling, advocacy, vouchers for IDs, Dvr Licenses, Birth Certificates, plus motel vouchers for qualified families. 443-2646

Social Services: 28th & R ST. M-F 7:30am-5pm. Call for asst. 874-2072

Employment Development Department (EDD): 2901 50th St. (at Broadway) M-F 8am-5pm. Unemployment, job services. 800-300-5616

Medi-Cal: 1-800-773-6467, 1-888-747-1222. Or see DHA eligibility workers 1725 28th St. 916-874-2256

Social Security Office: 8351 Folsom Blvd (College Greens Lite-rail stop) M-F 9am-4:30pm 381-9410: Natl line 1-800-772-1213

About SHA

The Sacramento Housing Alliance is a network of concerned citizens which promotes decent affordable housing for low income households and homeless people through advocacy and participation in public discourse.

*The SHA does not
itself provide or
manage housing.*

You may call for info:
(916) 455-4900

Individual Membership dues:
Standard: \$50;
Low-income, Student: \$10

Organizations:
\$200 - \$1,000
Dues based on organization budget, please call to get estimate.

Send donations to:
Sacramento Housing Alliance
1800 21st St. Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95814

CLASSIFIED

Mail or bring your ad to the Homeward office. Try to keep it under 25 words.

Jobs Wanted

Give hope and happiness.
Give a job, such as moving or yard work, to a homeless worker.

**Call Loaves & Fishes
job phone at 832-5510**

Or mail to:
Loaves & Fishes
Jobs for Homeless
PO Box 2161
Sac, CA 95812

**Social Security
Disability / SSI Lawyer
Free Consultation
(916) 658-1880**

**infoline is now:
211 Sacramento
Dial 211**
for tele-info & referral service

Califorina Youth Crisis Line:
1-800-843-5200

Health Rights Hotline:
551-2100

VA Outreach:
1-800-827-1000
Homeless VA Coordinator:
(916) 364-6547

**Welcome to
Homeward:**

Please help us make a difference!



Homeward Street Journal has been publishing since 1997 as a non-profit project of the Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee,

which is a member of the Sacramento Housing Alliance. The paper's mission is to alleviate miscommunication between communities by educating the public about housing and poverty issues, and by giving homeless people a voice in the public forum. Homeward also informs homeless persons of shelter and occupational assistance, and acts as a creative self-help opportunity for those individuals who wish to participate.

The opinions expressed in Homeward are those of the authors, and not necessarily the Sacramento Housing Alliance or SHOC or Homeward.

Submissions and Editorial Policy

We welcome any participation or contributions: Articles, poems and other writing can be submitted at our office in Friendship Park, or mailed to the address below.

All writing submitted for publication will be edited as necessary, with due respect for the author's intent. The editors will attempt to consult with an author if changes are necessary, however, the paper will go to print with the story as edited if the author is unavailable.

All Letters to the Editor must be signed to be published. If the writer wishes to remain anonymous s/he should so state, but the letter must still be signed.

Poetry and graphics will not be edited, either the paper will publish the submission or not.

In submitting articles to the paper, authors give their permission to print their submissions in accordance with the above stipulations, as well as possible reprinting in NASNA member papers, with due byline. Any requests for stories outside the above three will be referred to the author.

Subscriptions are available with a \$15 contribution. Make checks out to SHOC (Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee).

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