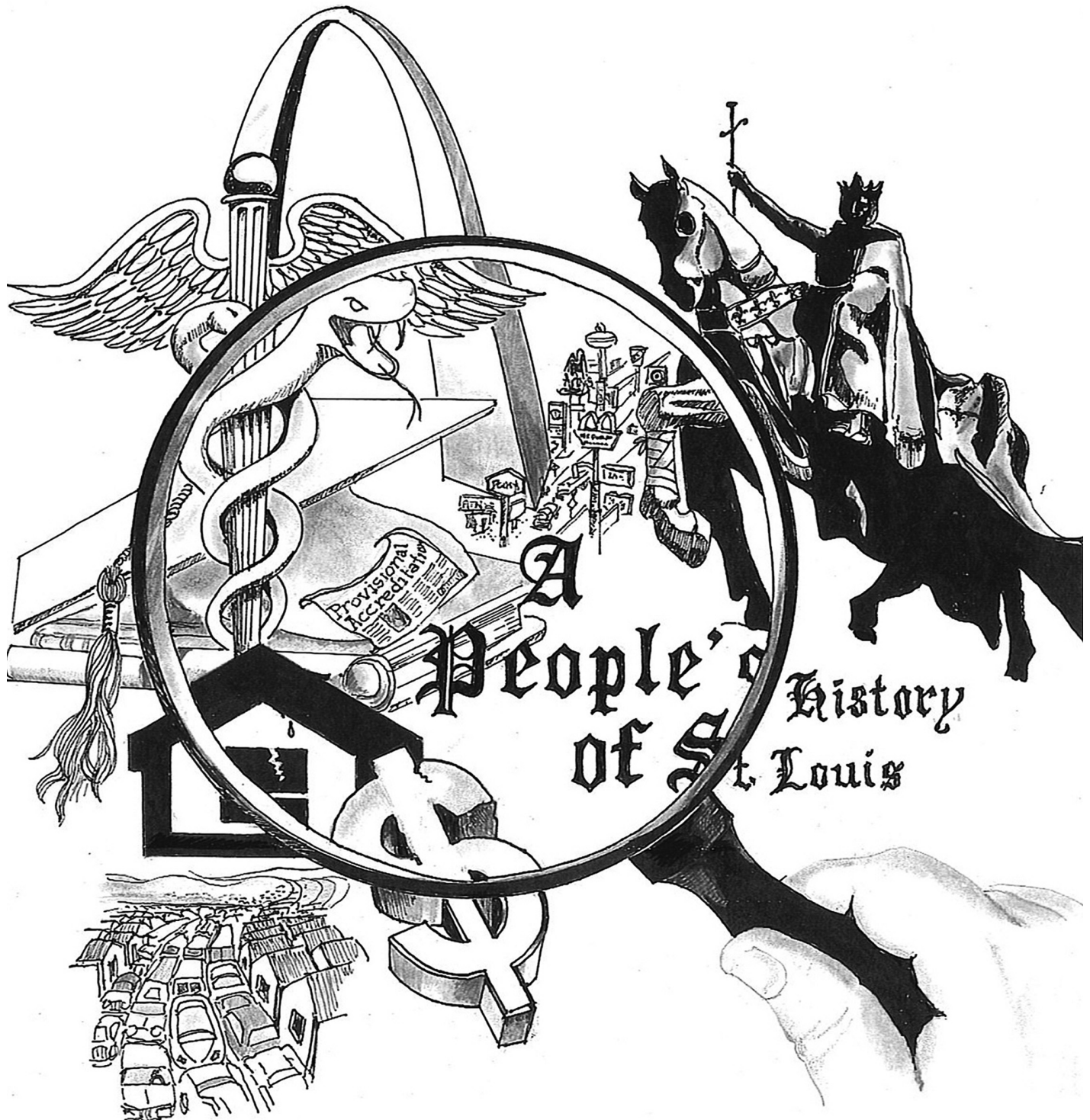


THE Round Table

Fall 2012

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



Why This Issue?

The banks of the Mississippi river at St. Louis are lined with pockled, knobby-looking cobblestones, which border the slow moving waters for about a half mile up and down river. Their horizontal rows slip into the river at its edge and line the rise of the bank up to Wharf Street, which runs parallel to them. Rusty iron rings fastened into the cobblestones testify to the docking of old steamboats and barges. Twisted and gnarled branches of driftwood lie about, having been nursed by the current onto land.

The rise of the bank leads the eyes upwards. A hill graded by a long, wide stairway leads to a broad expanse of green lawn, spotted by trees, which sits high above the river. The land majestically showcases the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, the elegant silver sculpture better known as the Gateway Arch.

What is perhaps not so widely known is that the acres of Arch grounds cover over the entire 40 blocks that was once the original village of St. Louis. And that a large Mound constructed by the Cahokia mound builders also once rose above the banks at this point.

Just as this piece of land is forgotten, so is the original history of our town often overlooked. It is also covered over, bypassed for a more triumphal narrative. The Arch celebrates the movement of European settlers into the westward lands of the continent. The history of our city (and of the U.S. generally) is often relayed through the march of armies, the acquisition of wealth, 'discoveries' by aristocratic explorers and the ongoing administrations of government officials.

Yet our city's earliest history was marked more by cooperation than conquest. St. Louis' founders were a 14 year old Creole from New Orleans and his mother's long time aristocratic French lover. They traveled up river in order to establish an outpost for a fur business. They displaced no native peoples in the establishment of their outpost in February of 1764; in fact they had negotiated with the native tribes in order to obtain a lease on the land. The indigenous inhabitants of the region, especially the Osage, accepted the fur trappers as business partners in the Osage's own thriving fur trade.

The first residents of the new city were mostly drawn from the French settlements in Illinois, refugees fleeing the British who had recently conquered their land. They included blacksmiths, carpenters, farmers, and above all merchants in this fur trading enterprise, as well as a sizable number of free blacks and Indians, and sadly, enslaved Indians and Africans. However, unlike New Orleans, which had been built by slave labor, St. Louis was built by the Illinois French who would inhabit it.

A truly Creole culture characterized the early years of the town, as French and Indians intermarried, and lived according to both French and Indian traditions. Neither of these cultures were puritanical; they knew how to party! They celebrated all the holy days, including Mardi Gras, Christmas, New Year's Eve. It is noteworthy that there were never any fortifications built around the town for protection; they weren't needed.

I think it is safe to say that here at the Worker, we love our city. We're proud of our traditions, our free public museums and zoo, our architecturally rich neighborhoods with their assortment of ethnic restaurants and shops. Above all, we treasure the people who come to our doors. All of them have a story which is both unique to them, and which also ties them to larger groups and historical movements. And so we wanted to take a new look at our city's history, its great moments and its failures, through the lens of the ordinary people who were its citizens. Our writers each drew on their particular expertise to bring us a personalist history, a new look at our old town.

Bill Ramsey writes of the history of the people's struggles for rights. Teka Childress conveys the story of housing in St. Louis. Justin Stein shows how that story is being written again today, in developer Paul McKee's efforts to blight the 5th Ward for his redevelopment plan. Mary Ann McGivern gives us the inside scoop on some of the economic decisions made by the powerful, and how they affected our neighborhoods. Tom and Maureen Filter-Nolan share their insights and experience on the education system in St. Louis.

In keeping with the theme of recovering our roots, Jenny Truax, in Catholic Worker Thought and Action, provides us with the little known history of the earliest Catholic Worker in St. Louis. Ashleigh Packard and Stewart Minor give us their newbie perspective on Karen House and Mike Baldwin sings us a song about Little House.

Revisiting our history is not just an academic exercise. We reclaim our past in order to reshape our future. ✚

-Ellen Rehg



Cover: Jeff Finnegan
Centerfold: Daniel Ryskiewicz

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: Jenny Truax, Teka Childress, Daniel Ryskiewicz, James Meinert, Carolyn Griffeth, Braden Tobin, Ellen Rehg, and Ben Schartman. Letters to the editor are welcomed.

Forward: The People's History of St. Louis

by Bill Ramsey

If a thorough "People's History of St. Louis" were written, this article might be its "Forward." Many of the accounts that would find their way into such a volume already exist in pieces preserved in the memories of those who populated them and in archives. This "Forward" will open windows. A complete airing of the house will await the skills and energies of others.

Any people's history of any parcel of this continent begins with an account of the lives of the indigenous peoples and their contact with those who intruded into their "old world." How did the Illini and Niutachi and Osage nations engage with trappers and settlers from Spain and France? These native nations had migrated to the St. Louis area from the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley after the unexplained disappearance of the Cahokia Mounds civilization. Today there are fewer than 6,000 descendants of the Illini, Niutachi and Osage peoples living in the area.

Official histories contend that the native peoples of the area signed treaties, accepting removal and displacement to reservations in Illinois, Kansas and Oklahoma. Is there another narrative? Were there attempts to resist? What tactics were used to placate opposition and put down insurgencies? Who retains this unrecorded history? If there are no written or oral records of the "underside" of European contact, how were these stories suppressed?

The recorded public abolitionist movement in St. Louis commences with Elijah Parish Lovejoy, a newspaper editor and Presbyterian Minister who founded *The St. Louis Observer*. After the *Observer's* press was destroyed three times, he moved to Alton, IL and founded *The Alton Observer*. On November 7, 1837, a pro-slavery mob attacked his press and fatally shot him.

The treatment of slaves and the thriving slave trade in St. Louis were depicted, not only by Samuel Clemens, but even more boldly by William Wells Brown. A St. Louis slave, Brown, escaped while unloading a boat in Cincinnati, and with the aid of Quakers Wells Brown found his way to freedom in New England and became one of the most effective voices of abolition. African Americans who migrated to St. Louis as free people played significant roles in the underground railroad.

Mary Meachum's home at 4th and Spruce was an underground railroad depot. St. Louis's role in the underground railroad is still shrouded in secrecy. Oral history contends that the caves linking Lemp Avenue

to the bank of the Mississippi provided a route to freedom. According to local newspapers, on May 21, 1855, Mary Meachum attempted to guide a group of slaves across the river, some of whom were enslaved by Henry Shaw. They were captured and Meachum was jailed and charged with "enticing slaves out of State." No record exists of the outcome of her trial.

On October 15, 1872, Virginia Minor attempted to register to vote in St. Louis but was turned away because she was female. Minor's action

was part of nation-wide attempts to register. She sued for infringement of her rights under the 14th Amendment in a St. Louis court in 1873 and then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The failure of the courts to recognize the right of women to vote led the suffrage movement to seek a Constitutional Amendment.

The St. Louis Coliseum (demolished in 1953) was the site of the 1916 Democratic National Convention and a "walkless parade." Convention delegates had to run a "polite gauntlet." St. Louis suffragists, carrying yellow parasols and wearing yellow sashes, lined the city streets between hotels and the Coliseum.

Union organizing in St. Louis began with German immigrants in the 1840s

and 1850s. It grew over the decades as waves of Irish, Italian, Eastern European Jews, and rural American immigrants came to St. Louis and exercised their rights in the work place. Local organizers called a general strike in 1877 and hosted the American Federation of Labor's convention as it began its campaign for the 8-hour workday. The 1900 street car workers strike so threatened the powers that they formed a posse that attacked striking workers, killing 14 and injuring many more in what became known as the Washington Avenue Massacre.

St. Louis' Washington Avenue garment district was the garment industry's low-wage refuge from unions in Chicago and New York. It became the scene of repeated strikes led by Hannah Hennessey and Fannie Sellins, who struggled not only to improve wages and working conditions but also gender equality and ethnic unity within the garment workers union.

During the first half of the 20th century waves of African Americans migrated from the Deep South to St. Louis seeking better paying jobs. They and their descendants became the leaders of movements to open up labor unions and secure civil and economic rights. Actions during the 1960's freedom movement focused more on equal access to jobs and



In 1963 the St. Louis Civil Rights movement launched a campaign against Jefferson Bank and Trust, focusing on the lack of African American employees at the bank, and on the widespread practice against employing African Americans in many St. Louis companies. Photo: St. Louis Post Dispatch



Bill Ramsey began his 32 years of work with others for peace and justice in St. Louis with the Karen House community.

homes than on public accommodations and voting rights. Earlier, there had been sit-ins at lunch counters and tea rooms in St. Louis department stores.

In the early 1960s, activists documented racist employment practices and challenged local companies to hire more African Americans. Late in the summer of 1963, Jefferson Bank's refusal to comply ignited a boycott and picket lines that defied a court order prohibiting demonstrations. The arrests of nine prominent leaders were followed by hundreds of arrests as insistence on more jobs and defiance of infringement of the right to assembly grew. On October 7, 19 demonstrators were jailed for seeking change, going to the bank's counter asking for coins in exchange for bills. In the end, although Jefferson Bank hired only six more African Americans, dozens of companies watching weeks of demonstrations began hiring more African Americans.

On July 14, 1964, activists Percy Green and Richard Daly climbed 125 feet of scaffolding up the side of the Gateway Arch to expose that no African Americans were employed in the federally funded construction project. The action included a "reconnaissance mission" the week before and a simultaneous "decoy" picket line in front of the Old Court House. The two remained perched on the arch for five hours before their arrests. Two weeks later, McDonnell-Douglas fired Green. His subsequent lawsuit went all the way to the Supreme Court, establishing a legal precedent that employers, not those alleging discrimination, had the burden to prove that their hiring and firing practices were not based on race.

The housing rights movement was founded in 1961 in Washington University professor Danny Kohl's kitchen and was initially funded out of a brown paper bag. The fledgling group sought a grant from the St. Louis Builders Association, whose members feared that if it became known they had funded an equal housing group they would never again build or sell another house. Reluctantly, they agreed to provide cash in a brown paper bag set under a tree in Forest Park. After picking up the cash, the housing rights group hired its first staff person.

Jones v. Mayer was the first Supreme Court case to rule that the Civil Rights Act of 1866—a Reconstruction era law which guarantees the right of all citizens to purchase property—applies not only to actions of the state but also to private parties. Mayer, a North St. Louis County developer had refused to sell a home to the interracial Jones family. After losing in the lower courts, the case was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court on April 1 and 2, while the Fair Housing Act was bogged down in Congress. On April 4th, Martin Luther King was killed in Memphis and within days Congress passed the Fair Housing Act. On June 17, the Supreme Court delivered its precedent-setting decision, extending protection from racial discrimination to home purchasers.

The movement to end the Vietnam War impacted area campuses and communities. Draft counseling centers were established, and "Hippy Hill," now the World's Fair Pavilion in Forest Park, was the site of dozens of rallies. A peace studies department was created at St. Louis University and a campaign to close down ROTC at Washington University climaxed with a mysterious fire that destroyed the ROTC building. St. Louis connections to the burning of draft files in Catonsville, MD included Christian Brother David Darst, who participated, and Washington

A Broad Brush

Sometimes
space and time
reluctantly requisition
a broad brush
sketching across
a canvas tightly
stretched over
a dozen decades

Hues are selected
from a partial pallet,
missing memories,
unnamed collaborators,
unimparted parables.

By necessity
a narrow narrative,
roughly chiseled out of
unshakable marble,
monumental movements.

Bill Ramsey
8/29/12

University Professor Dan Bolef, who harbored Dan Berrigan when he went "underground."

With the civil rights and anti-war movements under their belts, St. Louisans turned their efforts to protecting social change in the 1970s. Community activists marched to save Homer G. Phillips Hospital and City Hospital. Labor activists joined with religious leaders to turn back an anti-union "Right to Work" ballot initiative in 1978 and promote the United Farm Workers 1974-5 boycott of lettuce, grapes and wine.

From the front room of Karen House, researchers concerned about disarmament conducted a "defense dependency" study of the area and then proposed job conversion planning to McDonnell Douglas (now Boeing) and General Dynamics. Interfaith activists conducted weekly vigils and repeated acts of civil disobedience at Trident Submarine contractor General Dynamics' offices in Clayton. One resulted in the arrests of a former assistant State Attorney General, a city alderman and a local Rabbi. At one shareholders meeting, activists poured out their own blood, which had been drawn by Ann Manganaro in Karen House's community room.

St. Louis women's organizations and allies campaigned for the Equal Rights Amendment, and the Missouri House of Representatives voted to ratify the ERA on February 7, 1975. However, the Missouri Senate did not ratify the ERA, and Missouri did not become one of the three additional states needed for ratification by 1982. The Eagle Forum, a St. Louis area based anti-feminist organization, played a national role in the defeat of the ERA.

In the late 1970's, St. Louis environmentalists addressed land use and energy policy, launching citizen campaigns and ballot initiatives to oppose the Meramec Dam and the Callaway Nuclear Power Plant. Nearly two decades earlier, St. Louis had played a role in the Kennedy Administration's 1962 decision to halt above ground atomic bomb tests. In what is now the basement of the World Community Center, volunteers catalogued donated baby teeth that offered evidence that atmospheric tests were dispersing radioactive material widely.

Providing supportive communities as gay and lesbians "came out" was the early focus of the LGBT movement in St. Louis. In April 1980, the first of now more than three decades of LBGT Pride celebrations was held with a charity walk from the Central West End to Washington University. Participants envisioned a world where diversity is celebrated and prejudice eliminated. In the 1980's the LGBT movement "came out" as a public human rights movement, with community education and policy advocacy programs.

In the early 1980s, federal budget cuts devastated communities, the nuclear arms race escalated and companies closed St. Louis plants. Activists created an anti-budget cuts coalition and a nuclear freeze campaign. Union activists struggled to save jobs in the local auto plants. Welfare rights organizing and efforts to protect public housing programs became a matter of survival in many communities. Activists launched a coalition to challenge police abuse and create a civilian police board and supported movements to protect public education in St. Louis.

For six weeks in the spring of 1982, advocates for a freeze on the production, deployment and testing of nuclear weapons conducted

130 house meetings and sought over 10,000 signatures in each of the area congressional districts. 2,500 marchers presented piles of signed freeze petitions to congressional candidates at the end of their June 6, 1982 march from St. Louis University to Keiner Plaza.

Meanwhile by 1980, U.S. supported oppression and war raged in Central America. A few years earlier, Chilean refugees from the U.S. backed coup had come to St. Louis. Their stories and resettlement launched a solidarity committee, followed by an interfaith committee. When churches began to offer public sanctuary to Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees, interfaith activists explored sanctuary with places of worship, but Immanuel Lutheran Church, a small, predominately African-American congregation, was the only one willing to take the risk of providing sanctuary to Salvadorans.

Hundreds of volunteers monitored as a Salvadoran couple, "Julio and Maria," were publicly harbored in the church basement. Later, a Catholic religious order in Red Bud, IL and a community group in Forest Park Southeast joined Immanuel, providing sanctuary to Guatemalan families. In 1988 when Salvadorans had returned to their war torn communities from Honduras, St. Louisans accompanied them and then created a "companion community" relationship with a newly resettled community.

Out of the Sanctuary movement came activists prepared to protect Nicaraguans from the U.S./Contra war. St. Louisans provided long-term accompaniment to communities under attack. A Contra group detained two St. Louis Catholic Workers on the Nicaraguan/Costa Rican border. Weekly vigils were held in front the Old Post Office on Olive. In June of 1985, mock coffins were carried into Senator Danforth's office and 19 people were arrested. In June of 1986, six activists were removed from the Federal Court House as they attempted to present the U.S. Attorney with piles of evidence of U.S. violations of laws, some of which became the subject of Congress' Iran/Contra-Gate hearings.

Throughout the 1980s two endeavors of conscience continued –opposition to the death penalty and a refusal to pay war taxes. Quaker Eldora Spiegelberg engaged in both. For months she passed out leaflets at the County Court House in Clayton with 16 reasons (one each month) to oppose the death penalty and faithfully attended vigils as Missouri prepared to execute yet another prisoner.

When the children of Eldora's friend Clara Schmitt urged their mother to pay resisted war taxes, Clara invited Eldora to have tea with the IRS agent to help Clara explain to him why it was so difficult for her to pay for war. A decade later, after Clara's resisted taxes were redirected to remodel the attic of the World Community Center into four offices, the new floor was dedicated to honor Eldora.

Herschel Walker stood alongside Eldora at death penalty vigils. The son of an Arkansas sharecropper, he came to St. Louis in 1929 and joined the Communist Party's Unemployment Council. He opposed racist practices and supported union organizing at local plants. Herschel helped organize boycotts of Shell Oil and the South African Krugerrand and the Anti-Apartheid march of over 700 in downtown St. Louis in October of 1985. He was a member of Immanuel Lutheran Church when the congregation offered Sanctuary to Central American Refugees. In 1990, as he was delivering petitions against the closure of the Chrysler Plant, he was killed by a car driven by a person on cocaine.

The Gulf War (1991) was opposed with repeated rallies and vigils by a coalition of 30 local organizations, and army reservists' rights to conscientious objection were protected. The American Civil Liberties Union took the coalition's yard sign all the way to the Supreme Court when Ladue banned it from Margaret Gilleo's yard. In 1992, a coup in Haiti, followed by the U.S. deportation of Haitian refugees, brought hundreds into the streets of East St. Louis as choreographer Katherine Dunham fasted for 46 days. Ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide spoke from the Dunham home porch to 500 people, including many who migrated from earlier repression in Haiti. Likewise, thousands of Bosnians arrived in St. Louis after the siege of their homeland. St. Louisans joined them, conducting interfaith public marches and fasts for peace in 1994.

In the 1990s, a new coalition of labor, religious, student and community leaders arose to support union organizing among janitors, Catholic teachers, blood bank workers and nurses, to advocate for campus workplace justice, immigrant rights, farmworker justice, and health care and welfare reform, and to launch ballot initiatives to protect the earnings tax, affirmative action and a living wage. The coalition's effectiveness was built on the simple pledge to show up for someone else's cause five times a year.

On a chilly morning in December of 1998, as the U.S. launched a missile attack on Baghdad, eight people joined 83-year-old Eldora Spiegelberg to block the front gate of Scott Air Force Base, expecting immediate arrest. Instead, they sat on the cold pavement for two hours as cars backed up and officials debated the authority to arrest. Eldora was grateful for her long-johns and smiled as an officer

finally raised her off the pavement.

In December of 2001 when Henry Kissinger spoke at Powell Hall, over 150 people picketed at the front entrance with a large Kissinger puppet. A smaller group monitored the stage door. As a limousine arrived, one activist opened the back door, handed Kissinger a document and said, "Doctor Kissinger, this is an indictment from a court in Spain. I am prepared to take you there to be held accountable for what you did to the Chilean people." Security officers rushed in and whisked Kissinger inside the hall.

As the U.S. threatened another war on Iraq, a new coalition emerged, built on the experiences of existing groups and the energies of new groups. Thousands of yard signs were distributed in neighborhoods across the area. A crescendo of marches and rallies between September 2002 and March 2003 culminated in six feeder marches as 4,000 people converged on "Hippy Hill" in Forest Park.

Over the most recent decade, St. Louis labor, peace, racial justice, human rights, economic equity, women's, LGBT rights, and environmental activists have honed their skills and built new capacities to effect change. This "forward" opens only a few windows on the history that is their seed bed. Their heirs, a new generation of activists, are in place and ready. Forward to a People's History of St. Louis!

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Note: See following page for author's footnotes.



In the 1980s, the St. Louis Sanctuary Movement hosted immigrants fleeing U.S.-sponsored violence in Latin America. Immanuel Lutheran Church, a small predominately African-American congregation, led the way, publicly harboring a Salvadoran couple in the church basement. Photo from The New Sanctuary Movement.

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Homelessness in St. Louis

by Teka Childress

The Works of Mercy address the most fundamental needs of a human being: shelter, food, water, clothing, companionship and solidarity (in the case of visiting the sick and imprisoned.) Housing, the topic of this piece, is a fundamental need and right, especially in St. Louis, where the winters are cold and the summers are hot. And yet, with all of the housing available in St. Louis and across the United States, people are still ill-housed and un-sheltered. It is impossible to talk about this issue without addressing the system and systems which prevent people having housing.

E. P. Thompson, in his book, The Making of the English Working Class, described the enclosure of public lands in England as “a plain enough case of class robbery.”¹ When I look at people downtown sleeping on the ground in front of New Life Evangelistic Center and not even able to enter the City park nearby, which is now enclosed by a fence to keep them out, and out of sight of the loft-dwellers above, I am reminded of this piece of history.

It is hard to imagine there is a housing crisis when in 2010, there were 18,739,000 vacant properties in the United States.² This figure represents 14.3 % of all the housing units available. This number is much larger than the number of people who are homeless. In St. Louis, there are currently 1,489 vacant properties for sale by the City's LRA.³ I assume this does not include all of the housing that is slated for demolition.

I remember a conversation I had with my father when I was a young teenager. I said, “Dad, why are people starving when there is food being wasted?” He told me, “Well, it is complicated,” and he proceeded to explain to me the difficulties of moving goods and services around the globe and all of the politics involved. And, after his explanation I said, “Dad, why are people starving?” To his credit, I don't think his heart was in his answer. Here I am today, even older than he was, on that day when he tried to explain why

the economic system made it such that people could not have their needs met, and I am no more convinced. Some might think this was darling naivete, but rather, I think it was innocence. I was not yet inured into thinking that an unjust system made sense.

In this piece I will look at some of the forces in our system which make little or no sense and have caused a housing crisis. One thing is clear--the more that wealth and power have become

concentrated in the hands of a few in what Dorothy Day called our “filthy rotten system,” the more other people have lost power over their lives and no longer even have the means for such basics as housing. Many of the solutions that have been offered to deal with the homeless crisis mirror the system itself and can become oppressive and dis-empowering. I will look at some of them and then lastly, will discuss what are possible personalist models we might use to respond to this crisis.

Neighborhoods Gone By and Urban Renewal

Decisions about development, blighting, red-lining and investment all have an impact on people and

where they can or cannot live and for how long. While many of these issues will be addressed by other authors of *The Round Table*, it seemed impossible to talk of a people's history of housing in St. Louis without talking about the issue of people being re-located from their homes and neighborhoods and made to move elsewhere. I will offer one simple and perhaps less-known story of a neighborhood that was moved.

After World War II, the United States' urban housing stock was aging, there was a flight to suburban living, and cities began to decline. Urban renewal was thought to be the answer to this problem. Urban renewal plans were made to “revitalize” the part of town in St. Louis known as Mill Creek. Mill Creek, a neighborhood adjacent to St. Louis University to its east, has always loomed



Teka Childress isn't letting the Lifetime Achievement Award she received at the Karen House 35th anniversary celebration go to her head, in fact, she's feverishly preparing for another season with St. Louis Winter Outreach. (Call us if you'd like to get involved!)

large in my imagination since my mother told me about it when I was a child. There is nothing left of it now. When I read about the Mill Creek Housing in a document prepared by the St. Louis City Plan Commission I was given a dim view of it.

"The sewage-laden health-menacing creek that gave the area its name had long ago been drained and filled but Mill Creek Valley by the 1940s had decayed into 100 blocks of hopeless, rat-infested, residential slums. . . In 1954, a survey made by the Land Clearance For Redevelopment Authority documented the extent of the decay in Mill Creek Valley. The report showed that 99% of the structures in the area needed major repairs, 80% were without private bath and toilet, and 67% lacked even running water. . . The annual property tax revenue was \$365,000 on the entire 454 acre area. It cost the City seven times this to provide fire, police, health, and welfare services." ⁴

However, a very different view of Mill Creek was presented in a book called, *Mill Creek Valley: A Soul of St. Louis*. According to a review of the book on builtstl.com, the author of the book, Ron Fagerstrom, tells of how the Mill Creek neighborhood in Mid-town, which was destroyed in 1959, had a strong social network and an array of stores and restaurants. There were over one hundred small businesses in one city block. "Grocers, hairdressers, and dry goods..." When the area was blighted and razed, these residents were relocated to Pruitt-Igoe (which would later see the same fate) and to other neighborhoods across the City. Social networks long-established were disintegrated, and businesses lost their customer base. People who had no vehicles were moved to areas without nearby businesses, in areas being vacated by those who left the city. Real impoverishment began.

Whatever way one decides to judge this event, it seems clear that in the blighting of homes, and in the relocation of individuals and families, people's needs and rights are rarely fully regarded. Instead, what is most often the case, is, decisions are made by those in power, and by people outside of a neighborhood that affect those within, people who they likely do not even know. Practices such as blighting for development, restrictive zoning rules and land-banking for big developments create barriers for people to access needed homes and land and favor those who have power and wealth.

Why Do We Have an Epidemic of Homelessness?

In addition to the scourge of those without resources being moved from place to place, actual homelessness has become

an ongoing reality for over 600,000 people a year in the United States at any given time. In St. Louis there have been thousands of homeless families. The numbers have become this large since the early 1980s. In an interesting piece on the causes of homelessness, anthropologist Paul Koegel addresses some economic,

demographic, social, and policy decisions that led to a burgeoning of the homeless population.⁵ He distinguishes the economic and other forces from the issue of who is generally the most vulnerable to becoming homeless when these forces are in effect. I found this helpful because while we all have vulnerabilities, and issues that affect our lives, we might still have housing, and in fact, he points out that in earlier times, most of the population did have housing.

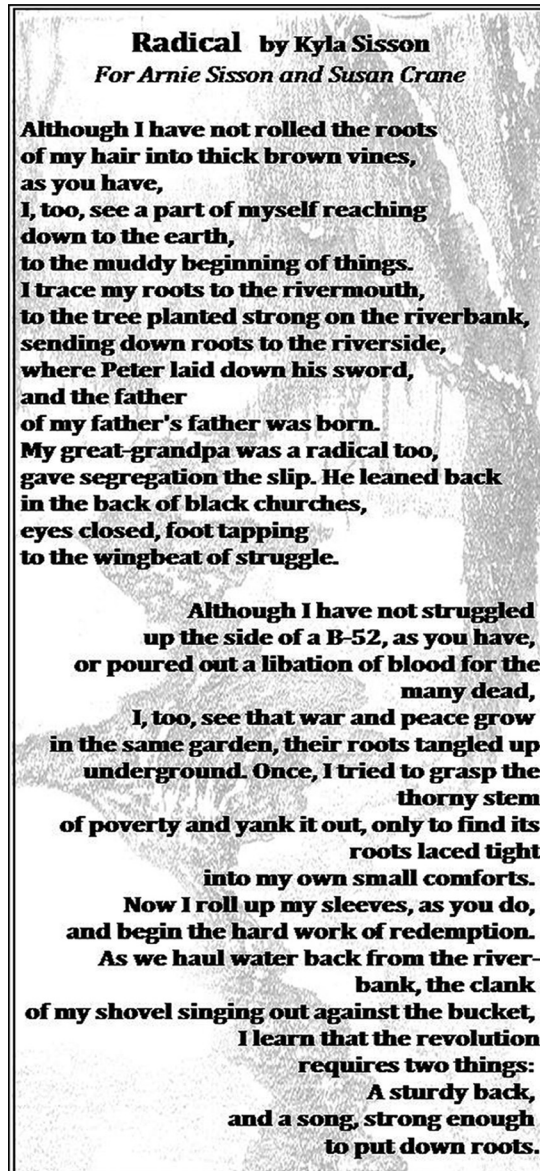
In looking at the forces that set the stage for this dramatic shift we see numerous factors that came together in a short period of time to bring radical changes to the housing scene.

In the 1970s, post-World War II baby boomers entered the labor force in large numbers. Starting around that time there was a great economic shift, "an unprecedented revival and intensification of global integration, supported by technical change, and . . . international economic policies. . ."⁶ This shift affected both the types and numbers of jobs available to United States citizens. Additionally, the growing inflation of the 70s, which was largely fueled by rising oil prices but was not reflected in increased welfare payments, reduced the real value of those payments. At the same time, in the 1970s Vietnam Veterans returned home, frequently wounded in body and mind. And those in mental institutions were released in large numbers as the asylums closed. Former residents were most likely happy to leave but were not given significant supports to live outside the institutions.

The Reagan Administration of the early 1980s changed the United States economy further by restructuring the tax code to favor

deregulation and fuel globalization to the advantage of corporations. As those corporations outsourced their labor, and long-established American companies closed due to take-overs, large numbers of manufacturing jobs were replaced by lower-paying service jobs.⁷

"The most dramatic cut in domestic spending during the Reagan years was for low-income housing subsidies. Reagan appointed a housing task force dominated by politically connected developers, landlords and bankers. In 1982 the task force released a report that called for "free and deregulated" markets as an alternative to government assistance – advice Reagan followed. In his first year in office Reagan halved the budget for public housing and Section 8 to about \$17.5 billion." ⁽⁸⁾



What this looks like is addressed by Patrick McKee in his article for *The Nation*:

“For an up-close view of the affordable housing crisis—which predated the mortgage . . . crisis of 2008 but has deepened since then into a full-blown national emergency—one place to be was the Jesse Owens Memorial Complex in the Red Bird neighborhood of Dallas. There, in the early morning hours of a typically scorching day this past July, thousands of impoverished Texans lined up for a chance to get on a waiting list for federal housing assistance, the first time in five years that the county government had accepted applications. Back in May another 21,000 people had applied for a shot at 5,000 spots on the Dallas Housing Authority’s waiting list—still better odds than in nearby Plano, where 8,000 people applied for only 100 available housing vouchers. . . . In Oakland, California, which opened its waiting list in January, officials expected as many as 100,000 people to apply for 10,000 vouchers. In Atlanta, sixty-two people were injured in 2010 at an East Point shopping center where 30,000 lined up after the local housing authority opened its waiting list for the first time in eight years.”⁹

In the early 1990s, under Newt Gingrich’s brief reign in Congress, new eligibility criteria for Welfare were established. The last of income supports for those in need was addressed. By changing the “Aid to Families with Dependent Children” to “Temporary Assistance to Needy Families” we indicated that there would be no “entitlement” to income for families.

What is significant about this policy is that while the deregulated economy essentially provided less employment and living wages for people in the United States, supports for those who could not find work were reduced and restricted.

Some Federal and Local Responses to Homelessness McKinney-Vento Act

The Federal Government began to realize the extent of homelessness and in 1986 Congress passed a piece of legislation called The Homeless Person’s Survival Act. It was expanded the next year, containing provisions for the emergency relief of shelter, food, mobile health care and transitional housing and passed. It was renamed The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act after its Republican sponsor who died, Stewart B. McKinney. This is the piece of legislation which has ruled the day for the homeless for the past several decades. The money to support these efforts is provided to cities who apply for the funds through their Continuum of Care group (CoC).

In St. Louis, such a group has functioned for years and most notably has been guided by the City office for Homeless Services. One of the elements of this has been the Housing Resource Center, a part of Catholic Charities, which has operated a hotline by which people obtain shelter. The City contracts with the HRC for this service. It also provides funding to many of the City shelters, which then allow the HRC to provide potential residents through

the hotline to their shelters. One of the programs that many of us at Karen House are familiar with is the Healthcare for the Homeless program which provides nurses who reach out to the homeless across the City.

While I admire many people involved in these local programs for the homeless and have been frequently amazed by their dedication and generosity and have seen people do much good, I still have the same thought I had years ago when I went to my first meeting to hear about the City’s plans. I thought then that its greatest weakness, was what many people thought was its greatest strength—its centralization of access to needed services. In an attempt to manage a great problem it attempts to filter all needs through one central system away from the rest of us who should

respond daily to the needs of those around us. People make one phone call to the hotline and frequently find nothing because the need is so much greater than the resources provided and the rest of us are off the hook assuming their needs will be taken care of elsewhere. The way this feels to those who call and call is heart-breaking. People often give up trying after waiting on hold for long periods of time only to find out once again there is nothing available.

Karen House receives the calls from the people who call the Hotline daily and have not found space. Most of the

time, we too, turn them away with limp phrases of “I am sorry and hope you can find something” our modern day versions of “be warm and well-fed.”

Additionally, shelters are not home. The other day a woman told me, with tears in her eyes, how exhausted she was after a year and one half of going from shelter to shelter. She had her own story. She had come from Chesterfield once upon a time. Things had happened to cause her to lose her housing and income. She said she saw things so differently now. It was hard to keep going, learning a routine of where to get your food, where to wash up, where to get your clothes, where you might wash your clothes, hoping you could get in the next shelter before your time is up where you were staying, trying to find computers to use to put in job applications, trying to get bus tickets to get places, trying to find clothes good enough to wear to a job interview. She said people began to act like it was normal to live like this. While we look at fences around city parks and abandoned housing throughout the city we must refuse to accept this as normal. She was glad to have housing but so much about the experience had been disempowering and humiliating for her.

Though much good has been provided to people through the McKinney-Vento Act and lives have literally been saved, a National Coalition for the Homeless fact sheet points out that while the programs created by the act “are needed now more than ever, as homelessness shows no signs of abating . . . it is clear that only by addressing the causes of homelessness. . . will homelessness be ended.”¹⁰



Photo - Franco Folini

The Hearth Act

A new piece of legislation was signed by President Obama in May of 2009: The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act. This act reauthorizes the McKinney-Vento Act with changes that focus on increases in prevention, changes in the definition of homelessness and an emphasis on performance. This is causing a shift of resources away from sheltering the homeless toward permanent housing. The CoC in St. Louis has focused many of its resources to programs that provide Permanent Supportive Housing by funneling funds to agencies that are beginning to provide this service. One such program is the one being offered by the Shalom House for chronically homeless women. Once given a voucher the woman finds an apartment that is paid for by the program. I recently helped a woman who was accepted for this program and she was ecstatic. She found a place she really liked and was so relieved to be leaving the shelter system. It is hoped by those offering these programs, that once housed, the individual will be able to obtain income through whatever method is appropriate for them. The City hopes that these efforts will bring an end to homelessness or significantly address the problem of homelessness. As someone who has been desperate to find housing while assisting people in finding places to live, I have been extremely grateful for the housing available, and have rejoiced with those who have acquired long-awaited homes. I am fearful, however, that for everyone who finds a home a new person will emerge who is homeless and who will need to seek help from the the limited resources available.

Additionally, sometimes people have told me it is hard to go through these programs. While they are happy and relieved to get the assistance, they have felt they had to go through humiliating proofs of disability, revealing to agencies their mental health diagnoses that they find hard to accept or that they feel will bring them much stigma. They gather proofs of how long they have been homeless and gather plenty of personal documents showing who they are. They then participate in the programs at the approval of other people and to some extent according to their rules. While there are ways in which some of these things are understandable, I often think I would find it hard to accept some of the help available.

What shall we do?

In my work, I accompany people in obtaining access to any program for which they are eligible because they need and deserve a home. Yet, it is essential that our response to the housing crisis addresses some of its causes and resists those things that are "a plain enough case of class robbery." Additionally we must create models of how to provide housing in ways that regard the dignity of those needing it. Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin provided us with one such model. They pointed out that we need not wait or look to others to provide for those in need but could follow a tradition as old as the early centuries when Catholic monks offered hospitality to wayfarers. The Catholic Worker model of hospitality has inspired people to open houses of hospitality across the country in urban settings. Peter also envisioned how workers and scholars could live and share their lives together on farming communes.

This model can be seen on Catholic Worker farms and has been recently expanded by members of the Possibility Alliance.

They have developed a vision of establishing an agronomic university on their land in Northern Missouri, where urban residents can come and find a home and sustenance on the land.



Rev. Chris Rice joined our community recently to propose an option to those he called "the unsheltered," those who live outside. He and his father, Rev. Larry Rice, have sought to establish the right of people to live on available land. He believes that those who cannot find housing or shelter should be able to find somewhere safe where they can live together in community. He wants to develop a model similar to one that is well-known in Portland, Oregon, Dignity Village.

Churches throughout the City have been opening their doors in the Winter to welcome those who have no shelter as part of the St. Louis Winter Outreach. It is hoped that as we come to know one another we will no longer accept the fate of those who have so horribly suffered.

Further, I have been wondering if we might call for a long overdue Jubilee in the realm of housing. "This fiftieth year is sacred—it is a time of freedom and of celebration when everyone will receive back their original property, and slaves will return home to their families." ¹¹ I was thinking about what this might look like and wondered if there were ways for communities to obtain some of the vacant housing across the country to share with those needing a place to live, and to find ways to keep people in their homes who are victims of the mortgage debacle that has so enriched another segment of the population.

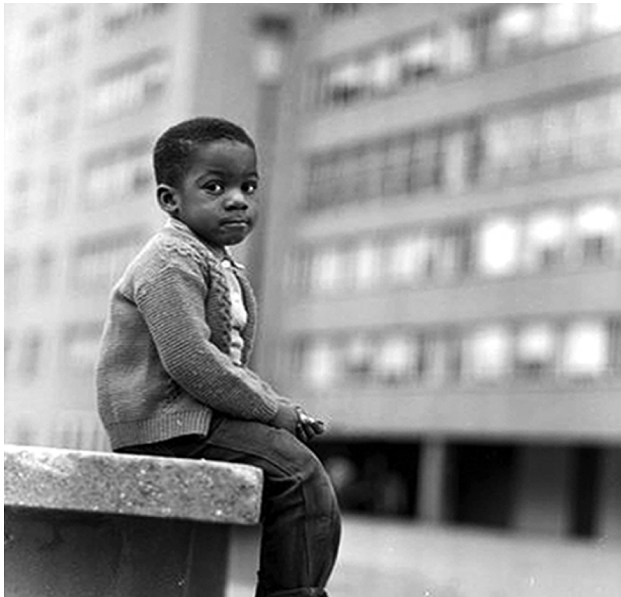
These responses may seem small but if we all participate in them real change may happen. ✚

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10. National Coalition For The Homeless Fact Sheet #18
11. Leviticus 25:10

Paul McKee's Legacy: Racism in St. Louis Urban Renewal Efforts

by Justin Stein

St. Louis has a sordid history in relation to urban redevelopment projects. Proponents have historically framed urban revitalization as something that will benefit the entire city and improve the lives of all of its residents. City planners in the mid-twentieth century believed their efforts would recreate the city of St. Louis to benefit all of its members.¹ The idea that urban renewal will improve the lives of all St. Louis citizens continues to present itself today. According to Mayor Francis Slay, private investment in north St. Louis will benefit the whole city. He states "...it is in everyone's interest – especially the people who live in or near these neighborhoods – that these private developers be successful."² The sad reality, however, is that redevelopment projects in the past have



Outside Pruitt-Igoe, a 33 building public housing project, and an icon of public-policy planning failure. Federal policy at the time dictated that no "able-bodied man" could live in Pruitt-Igoe, therefore fathers had to leave for their families to be eligible to live there. Strategically located away from Downtown St. Louis, Pruitt Igoe was under-funded, quickly fell into disrepair and isolation, and was demolished less than 20 years after its construction. 'The Pruitt-Igoe Myth' documentary eloquently tells its story. Photo: St. Louis Public School Archives

not only failed to improve the city for everyone but have directly harmed some of the city's most marginalized citizens.

Historically urban revitalization projects in St. Louis have exacerbated the structural inequality felt by the city's working-class African-American population. Federally supported disinvestment from the nation's cities, urban renewal efforts promoted by political and corporate leaders as a response to this disinvestment, the destruction of historically low-income Black neighborhoods, and the creation of institutionally neglected public housing projects illustrate the ways in which racism has permeated urban development schemes throughout the twentieth century. Adhering to national trends, local revitalization projects have viewed working-class Black neighborhoods as undesirable communities to be controlled and segregated from the rest of the city's population.

Redevelopment endeavors in the city of St. Louis are still being proposed today. The NorthSide Regeneration project is an \$8.1 billion redevelopment plan promoted by the private real estate company McEagle Properties, LLC, headed by developer Paul McKee. The proposed area for the project is the majority low-income and African-American 5th Ward in north St. Louis, as well as several neighborhoods in surrounding north city wards.³ Sadly, the NorthSide Regeneration project is rooted in the destructive history of urban renewal in St. Louis. Paul McKee has failed to break from the legacy of racism in St. Louis urban renewal efforts in his promotion and implementation of the NorthSide Regeneration plan.

The story begins with the creation of the Federal Housing Authority in 1934. The agency backed low-interest home mortgages from banks for homes in the suburbs while denying the protection for loans made to buy property in cities.⁴ The FHA and later the Veterans' Administration, after the passage of the GI Bill in 1944, promoted white home ownership in the suburbs and refused to back loans for African-Americans and other people of color in urban centers. This process created a dynamic in which African-Americans and other people of color were increasingly segregated into decaying urban centers while many whites were given home ownership loans to move into well-resourced suburban areas.



Justin Stein enjoys working as a community organizer in his hometown of St. Louis.

River City

A city ain't just concrete and stone
Steel, O no
ain't just roads black asphalt grumbling
groaning neath the wheel
A city be flesh blood bone
Spirit and soul

People
make a city
good people city people good people
Like walls are made up
Of single bricks
People make a city a city

People coming up Here
From Down South
Ridin Underground railway steel
Rafts and boats
Leapin like a trout
Votin with their feet
Seekin the Promised Land
People of the great Migration Exodusters trekkin to
The Lou



Up with Satchmo and Jazz on the riverboats
from Storyville
People with their sorrow songs
and spirituals and quilting and
home cooking woodcutting and tall tales and
big talking and
boogie barrel house and blues and singing

Many mixed Afrkan tribes
and the European
And the Native American
The black lump in the melting pot

NOW the Powers That Be let the Devil use 'em, let ol' Satan
get all down in their bowels so their hearts were hardened and
their eyes were blinded and their ears were stopped and
would not see know or hear what was Right and Correct

And so they decreed that No Afrikan, no Black, no Negro No
Colored need apply or let the Sun go down on 'em on the
wrong side of the railroad tracks and many other color struck
taboos



SO THEN arose from amongst them strugglers and strivers
and champions and lovers and seekers after Freedom and
Righteousness, hungry and thirsty for same, who did go
among the People, the Afrikan and the Black and the Negro
and the Colored and good men and women of every other
hue, and did agree that they was not down wit dat mess



**Selected verses from the poem 'River City Dance' by Chris Hayden
from the anthology *St. Louis Muse*. Used with permission from the
publisher, Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis**

ty Dance

And thus did use skillz and education and degrees legal to
smite the chains of The People and make open accommodations
and access for all and did rise from the ghettos and the projects
to stride the halls of Congress singing, “No Permanent Friends,
No Permanent Enemies, Just Permanent Interests” and did march
on the Jefferson Bank and did sit in and pray in and picket and
was jailed but in the end economic justice prevailed



And did deeds on the East Side that was
inspiring in the cause
of Civil Rights, couldn't nobody turn 'em around or hold 'em
down not even federal prison and
the buildings blazed with their
names all over East Boogie town

and did leave the comfort of well paying
job on the jet plane assembly
line to climb the north leg of the Arch as it was under
construction demanding economic justice and did lie down
and sit in and chain up and take ACTION



People who was not down wit no mess
The Revolution they started was quiet
River City Dance no riot



People who hungered and thirsted after Truth Freedom
and Righteousness
Wanted Liberty and Justice for All to Live and Breathe
Free

Feel the beat
Sing Free at Last
And do dat River City Dance

A city aint just concrete and stone
It aint material thangs alone
It's people knowing who they are and where they
come from
praying shouting singing playing writing striving
It's they soul and spirit that last

Eidolons Icons
Totemic magic in their very names
Say Annie Malone, Homer Phillips, Wendell Pruitt,
Julia Davis
Say Mama Esther

The story is ourstory ours
And the people are like a background of black velvet
Their stories glitter on them like a billion billion
Glittering Stars
Dope RiverCity got it all A to Z
In raps songs and chants
In their call and response
Def Jammin people like Ole Man River
Big Muddy
Dissed and ignored
Brown and eternal like a blues tale sad & funny

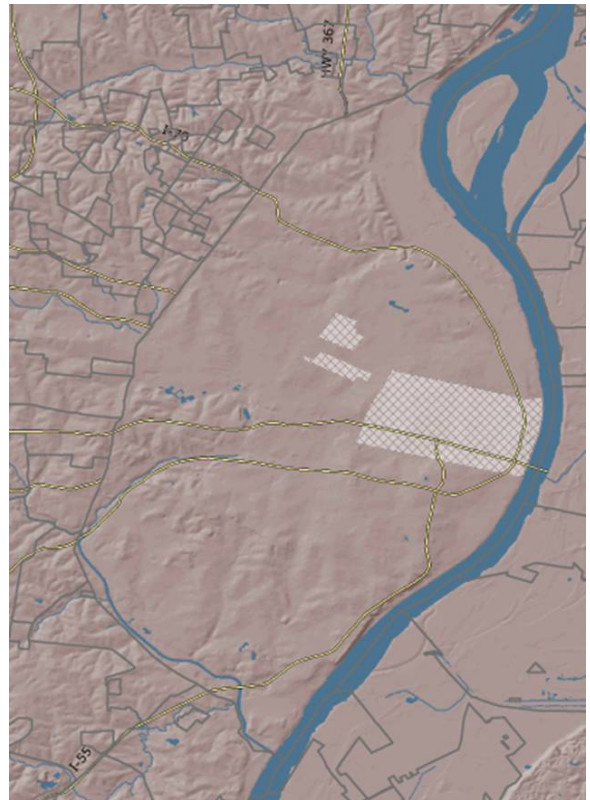
Additionally, federal housing law provided for the U.S. Housing Authority to give financial support to city governments to construct public housing for low-income people.⁵

St. Louis urban renewal efforts emerged from this context. The St. Louis Planning Commission unveiled its comprehensive City Plan in 1947, which would bring dramatic changes to St. Louis. According to historian Mark Abbot, “the plan would drive freeway placement, housing policy, urban renewal projects, and virtually every land use issue in St. Louis for longer than its expected life span of twenty-five years.”⁶ The plan was designed to revitalize the city and promote its viability during a time when the rise of the automobile and suburban sprawl were driving individuals and industry out, especially from the downtown area. However, the ideas embedded in the plan would prove to be detrimental to the city’s low-income African-American population. It labeled certain areas of the city as “obsolete,” asserting they were past repair and in need of complete demolition before being rebuilt. The idea was to tear down substandard housing stock and replace it with an improved neighborhood model. While race was never explicitly mentioned in the plan, all the areas labeled as obsolete and in need of demolition were overwhelmingly low-income African-American neighborhoods.⁷

Business and political leaders in St. Louis took the 1947 plan and implemented it to serve their interests. The Land Clearance and Redevelopment Authority (LCRA) in St. Louis worked with private developers to acquire properties in areas surrounding downtown that the St. Louis Planning Commission had declared to be obsolete. While working with private developers to acquire these properties the LCRA simultaneously worked with the St. Louis Housing Authority to create public housing sites with federal dollars.⁸ These dynamics would eventually coalesce to produce a turning point in the narrative of St. Louis urban development with the demolition of Mill Creek Valley and construction of the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex.

In 1952 St. Louis Mayor Joseph Darst created Civic Progress, Inc., an entity comprised of local corporate leaders, to lead the redevelopment of downtown.⁹ Civic Progress led a campaign in 1954 to encourage the St. Louis electorate to pass proposals to fund urban renewal projects. Similar to past and future city planning schemes, Civic Progress framed the campaign as a way to improve the city and promote investment. In 1955 all the proposals passed, allocating \$110 million for redevelopment, which included \$10 million for “slum clearance.” Civic leaders believed that to attract private investors the city needed to clear downtown of its surrounding low-income Black neighborhoods.¹⁰ The St. Louis Planning Commission had declared these areas, such as Mill Creek Valley, to be obsolete in its Comprehensive City Plan of 1947.

While Mill Creek Valley may not have been the best place to live, it was one of the oldest and most pronounced African-American communities in the city. The area had high levels of poverty and many homes lacked basic plumbing.¹¹ In many respects, however, it was the cultural center for African-American life in St. Louis.¹² The LCRA started demolishing Mill Creek Valley in 1959 with \$7 million from the proposals passed in 1955. The demolition of the area displaced roughly 20,000 residents. Many of the people from the area moved to public housing that had been recently constructed, especially on the north side of the city.¹³ In essence, urban renewal in St. Louis during the mid-twentieth century meant low-income African-American people were forced



Over the years, a patchwork of local, state, and federal policies have explicitly segregated the City's population. The St. Louis Realty Exchange has been a major enforcer by actively discouraging desegregation in the private housing market. In 1923, it established these “unrestricted zones” where African Americans were permitted to reside. More info: [Mapping Decline](#) by Colin Gordon

to move to fit the ideal city arrangement thought of by St. Louis political and corporate leaders.

The federally funded housing complexes to which many low-income African-Americans moved were strategically dislocated from downtown. As historian Clarence Lang argues “...public housing projects [did] not fundamentally [alter] relations of race, poverty, and place. If anything, the new settlements [reinscribed] them.”¹⁴ Pruitt-Igoe, built in 1952 as a large scale high rise housing complex in the demolished Desoto-Carr neighborhood, soon became the most notorious. It quickly turned into a poorly resourced, unsafe, and segregated area for some of the city’s poorest African-American residents. Public transportation was largely out of reach for the residents of Pruitt-Igoe, and it did not take long for the housing authority to cut janitorial and security services. This led to an increase in crime and the physical deterioration of the space. The institutional neglect and its subsequent problems contributed to the project developing a bad reputation.¹⁵ Eventually, the city demolished the project in 1972.¹⁶

Thus is the tale of urban renewal in St. Louis during the mid-twentieth century. Racism fueled white flight and mass divestment from urban centers in which many low-income African-Americans lived. Political and corporate leaders sought to combat the dynamic of suburban sprawl and urban decay by advocating the revitalization of the city, specifically in the downtown area. The logic of institutional racism held that the city would have to remove poor Blacks from their neighborhoods to make corporate-driven revitalization a reality. The city built public housing for those displaced, but it ultimately had the effect of quarantining

low-income African-Americans in substandard and institutionally neglected projects largely segregated from vital resources. When public housing was concluded to be a failure, low-income African-Americans were displaced once more when their homes were demolished again.

Declaring certain areas as obsolete or advocating for slum clearance may not be politically viable terms to use today. However, it is reasonable for modern day observers to conclude contemporary urban renewal projects will have similar results to those a half century ago. City residents can see the dynamics of racism operate most acutely by observing the development of Paul McKee's Northside Regeneration plan, a project St. Louis political and corporate leaders unwaveringly support.

The St. Louis Board of Alderpeople has attempted to declare the entire 5th Ward and surrounding project area as blighted in order to provide NorthSide Regeneration with a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) package.¹⁷ Thankfully, Circuit Court Judge Robert Dierker ruled against the TIF plan, which has served to currently block McKee from moving forward with much of his project.¹⁸ Despite this, McKee has still received close to \$30 million in Missouri state tax credits.¹⁹ The city of St. Louis also recently sold him 162 acres of land around his north city project site, as well as a two year option on the former Pruitt-Igoe site.²⁰

The city's desire to blight a huge part of the city in the interests of corporate development is reminiscent of the 1947 Comprehensive City Plan's label of "obsolete" given to mostly low-income

much lower price than normal. Similar to urban renewal schemes sixty years ago, the city's political apparatus seems determined to degrade the neighborhoods of working-class African-Americans and throw all its support behind the interests of wealthy white developers.

In addition to McKee and the city's desires to declare the entire project area as blighted, NorthSide Regeneration's end result is likely to be negative for the majority of residents currently living in the area. According to 2000 U.S Census figures, slightly over 80% of the 4,635 dwellings in which people in the 5th Ward currently live are occupied by renters.²² According to Northside Regeneration's own website, roughly 49% of North City residents are financially poor.²³ Additionally, 2010 census data suggests that roughly 77% of 5th Ward residents are African-American.²⁴ When looking at the anticipated outcome of the project, observers must question how these current residents will benefit, if at all. The plan states that condominiums, townhouses, and single family homes will comprise 5,300 of the units that will be for sale for anywhere under \$200,000 to over \$750,000. Additionally, 3,500 units will be for rent at market rate prices while 1,200 rental units will be available with subsidies.²⁵ The problem with these numbers is that many of the current residents in the area targeted for the NorthSide Regeneration plan will not be able to afford to live there once the endeavor is completed. NorthSide Regeneration's projection of affordable rental property simply does not meet the need current data suggests. Additionally, the significant number of low-income people in the project area will be unable to purchase a home for over \$250,000. Similar to the 1947 Comprehensive City plan and proponents of urban renewal in the mid-twentieth century, advocates of NorthSide Regeneration today have failed to include a race and class analysis in their plans or an explicit understanding of how racism has operated historically in urban renewal efforts. As history has shown, this neglect can have negative consequences for some of the city's most exploited citizens.

Similar to urban renewal proponents in the mid-twentieth century, the advocates of the NorthSide Regeneration project today have framed their efforts as something that will improve the lives and conditions of everyone living in St. Louis. However, like urban renewal proponents in the past, contemporary political and corporate leaders have done little to prove it. The 5th Ward and its surrounding neighborhoods are certainly worthy of investment, similar to areas such as Mill Creek Valley sixty years ago. However, the silence by the city government and proponents of NorthSide Regeneration in regards to the very real history of racism in urban renewal projects, as well as the way the project has developed thus far, illustrates how NorthSide Regeneration is reaffirming a legacy of racism in St. Louis. Grassroots community action will decide whether this pattern of racism is interrupted, or whether the NorthSide Regeneration project will exacerbate the oppression of Black working-class people in St. Louis similar to that of urban renewal projects in the past. ✦

Note: See next page for sources.



Sidney Maestre and Mayor Raymond Tucker overlook the Mill Creek Valley demolition in 1956. Photo: Unknown.

African-American neighborhoods. Several homeowners in the 5th Ward and surrounding area have argued the proposal has already decreased their property values, and have also expressed fear that it will only decrease more if the TIF package is approved.²¹ Proposing to declare the 5th Ward and its surrounding area as blighted also has the potential to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. If maintaining and improving their property will not raise the value of their houses, then homeowners and landlords have no incentive to invest more into their property. This can lead to the creation of substandard housing stock specifically for the majority of the population in the area that rents. Declaring the area as blighted also allows for private developers to buy property in the area for a

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Economics in St. Louis: Corporations, Jobs and Politics

by Mary Ann McGivern

The First Things I Learned about the Topic

It must have been around 1974 when I attended a meeting here in St. Louis of Ralston Purina executives about a shareholder resolution to study hunger in Columbia, Honduras, Peru and Ecuador. The company had bought up hundreds of thousands of acres of land that had been used by tenant farmers to grow black beans. Ralston planted sorghum; gave chickens and chicken incubators to land owners; and signed an agreement with them that they would buy the sorghum as chicken feed and sell the chickens only to Ralston Purina. The shareholder charge was that the former tenant farmers were now suffering hunger.

During the hour of this meeting I learned two things. First, one of the men at the meeting had an MA in agriculture from Purdue and had represented Ralston in Latin America for ten years. He negotiated regularly with Ministers of Agriculture. It dawned on me that those ministers were probably political appointees and even if they were farmers, the negotiating field was not level. This Purdue grad brought so much knowledge to bear it would not be difficult for him to persuade these ministers that doing business with Ralston Purina was all benefit and no cost.

A note: two years later Ralston did perform the study we requested and reported back that indeed hunger was on the rise in areas where land was being taken out of black bean production. But of course the deals were done.

But here is the second thing I learned and it is why Ralston didn't see the light and end its chicken outsourcing: In the middle of the meeting one of the executives looked at me and said, "You want these people to remain in an impoverished barter economy. You don't want them to develop a capital market." That's how he saw it. If there was hunger it was a regrettable by-product of growth. What I saw was that we didn't just have different perspectives; we lived in different worlds.

That meeting was a real turning point in my life, propelling me to the Catholic Worker and the margins of society. I lived at the Worker and my day job was at the St. Louis Economic Conversion Project where Virginia Nesmith and I tracked weapons manufac-

ture and tried to find willing listeners to make the case that military spending is bad for the economy.

A Meeting with the Mayor

It was around 1990, fifteen years after my meeting with the Ralston people, when Virginia and I were invited to a big-deal meeting with the president of the County Economic Council, the Mayor of St. Louis, and various city and county department heads. Military spending cuts were resulting in big McDonnell Douglas layoffs. What steps could the region take?

The Mayor was late to the meeting. He came in and said, "Sorry. I was on the phone with Carl."

I thought, Carl. He's been on the phone with Carl Icahn. He thinks he can negotiate with Carl Icahn. Just like those ministers of agriculture who

thought they could negotiate with Ralston Purina.

For those who don't know or don't remember, Carl Icahn is the business mogul who bought TWA and sold it off, route by route, plane by plane, dismantling a business in order to make a lot of money.

Elected Leaders as Capitalist Prey

My take on the St. Louis economy is that we have had a history of mayors, county executives, aldermen, and even governors and senators who thought they could negotiate with big business and instead were thrown under the bus. We're not a third world country and I don't want to diminish the suffering of those black bean tenant farmers. But thanks to our corporate citizenry and their manipulation of local politicians, we are experiencing de-development.

The Round Table editors, when they asked me to write this piece, had in their minds the weapons made at Boeing and the genetic engineering done at Monsanto. It is true that Boeing makes nuclear delivery systems and assembles the smart bombs – bad stuff. Monsanto products too are problematic. In addition, Ameren Electric operates one nuclear power plant and would like to build another. Emerson Electric keeps its HQ here, but moved all its production lines to no-union states and countries. Then there's



Coal Tower- Max Arthur Cohn, Smithsonian American Art Museum



Mary Ann McGivern came to the Worker in 1977. She is a Sister of Loretto and founder of the St. Louis Economic Conversion Project which became the Peace Economy Project. She is a self-taught community-economist.

the failure of the banks to invest in their customers' communities, losing it instead in bad mortgage deals in the sun belt and credit default swaps.

But these singular corporate failings, serious though they are, are not an explanation of the economic burden St. Louis bears. Rather, I would say the biggest problem is the decisions that have been made by those corporate leaders as they functioned as Civic Progress. And the bitter irony is that these corporate leaders meant to do good.

Civic Progress

Civic Progress, comprised of 18 heads of St. Louis business, was formed in 1953. Among its early accomplishments were the financing and building of Busch Stadium to replace Fairgrounds Park Stadium, the development of the Market Street Mall and the building of the Arch, whose plans had been mothballed for a decade. The companies donated some land, built new offices along Market Street, and gained 30-year tax exemptions, a future loss to the schools that offsets the gain of the Mall and Stadium if not the Arch.

It's a mixed record. The St. Louis Community College District owes its existence to Civic Progress. Arts funding, development of Laclede's Landing, the Convention Center, MetroLink, and many housing initiatives were born at Civic Progress. So were the St. Louis Blues' and Rams' sports stadiums, Lambert Airport expansion, the Page Avenue Extension, Forest Park renewal and the new Mississippi River bridge. Civic Progress also claims a leading role in keeping Scott Air Force Base open when Congress recommended its closure to save money and reduce redundancy.

My short evaluation is that housing and infrastructure development are good public investments; entertainment, that is, sports and riverfront gambling, is a poor investment of public monies; and lobbying for military spending because we need the jobs is morally wrong.

What Has Happened to Civic Progress?

In the 60 years since, St. Louis has lost the corporate headquarters of McDonnell Douglas, Southwestern Bell, Pet Milk, Seven-Up, General Dynamics, Anheuser Busch, Ralston Purina, TWA and more.

The banks have gone too: Mercantile, First National, Boatman's. We have a couple of very small banks, but back in the day these locally owned banks were a vigorous part of Civic Progress and they played a big role in the local economy.

Today it looks to me like Civic Progress is less of an oligarchy and more of a contributor to the community. This is because it's not made up of CEOs but of managers who don't have the power to implement big ideas.

Jobs, Manufacturing and Industrial Competence

But here's the problem. Between 1970 and 1995 St. Louis lost 77,000 manufacturing jobs. One time when I raised this in a planning meeting during McDonnell Douglas layoffs, someone said dismissively, "Those are job shops. We don't want job shops."

Another time, when I suggested strategic support of light industry, one job-retraining staffer honestly said out loud in the meeting, "If we did that, we'd lose our jobs."

Neither the politicians nor the bureaucrats nor the corporate moguls have any empathy for welders, auto mechanics, tool and die makers, screw manufacturers, much less mass production bakeries or industrial soap makers.

Two cases in point: there used to be a cookie factory on Cass near the Worker. Neighbors called it the "broken cookie factory" because you could buy broken cookies cheap. But as I became more interested in supporting small city business, our alderwoman and others pointed out that the broken cookie factory parking lot was filled. Nobody walked to work. The plant didn't hire locally.

I said repeatedly that once somebody got a job with modest pay and benefits, of course they would want to move out of the neighborhood. But generally people didn't see that the neighborhood gained anything but cheap broken cookies.

And then a local church group set out to close the little soap factory. I argued and the organizers said, "People in the county don't have to live on the same block with a factory that makes soap." True enough.

Using that same reasoning an alderwoman denied an expansion permit to Western Wire east of Lafayette Square so Western Wire which makes fasteners moved to Jefferson County where it expanded and employs 100 manufacturing workers.

But there is another way to think about neighborhood industry.

In 1983 Harold Washington was elected mayor of Chicago. He put on his staff two young men who had been part of the national economic conversion movement. I

knew them. We had been to workshops together about this concept of industrial competence, the accumulated tools and skills of an industry or a corporation or a city. They had been asking what commercial products weapons corporations could make if peace broke out. But now, in Chicago, they had a simpler question: can the city help small manufacturers to keep on making things and keep jobs in the city?

Chicago, like St. Louis, had job shops on a lot of corners. They welded; they applied chrome finish; they bored holes; they stamped patterns with presses.

There was a welder kitty-corner from the Little House in St. Louis. A policeman told me once all the nightsticks were made there, polished, with a brass band. He remembered when his father, also a police officer, took him there as a little



"Photographer" Unknown

boy to pick up special-order nightsticks as Christmas gifts and the boy watched the welder work.

When I moved to the Little House in 1981 that shop was functioning. So was a bigger shop behind us facing 16th Street that made platens for typewriters. McDonnell Douglas trucks came by every couple of months during the very busy '80s with outsourced jobs for both firms.

Back in Chicago, this is the kind of corner industry that Mayor Washington's staff set out to save. Their first question was: do you have a succession plan? When the welder across the street from me died, his son, an engineer, worked in the shop some weekends to fill orders and make extra money; but he let the two employees go and after a year or so he auctioned off the equipment and walked away from the little building. When the owner of the platen plant died, his children just shut it down, laying off another three workers. Most small job shops don't have a succession plan, though selling the plant to employees yields a good tax benefit.

Platens were going to die soon, along with typewriters, but in Chicago the mayor's staff helped owners make succession plans and assess their capacity: What else could they make? What did their customers want? These are the questions we were asking the arms manufacturers and their subcontractors here in St. Louis. But nobody asked my manufacturing neighbors.

The Chicago team helped corner shops with one or two employees upgrade equipment, sharpen their bidding skills, and partner with other job shops to bid on bigger jobs. They also sent manufacturing representatives to Wisconsin and Iowa and southern Illinois, looking for work for the metal pressers and welders and sheet metal workers.

Talk about the dignity of work is cheap. Chicago Mayor Washington put money behind the concept.

In general in the United States, we have been smitten by bigness. We willingly followed big business CEOs down that garden path, agreeing with Senator Eagleton, for example, that St. Louis needed an NFL team in order to be a first class city. We are still paying off \$2 billion for that stadium – and our contract with the Rams demands another quarter of a billion or so in stadium upgrades.

Nobody said it was worth hiring staff to support the thousand job shops in the city, that St. Louis needed the undergirding of at least 5,000 welders and cookie makers in order to be a first class city.

Think what it would have meant if instead of paying \$100 million on the stadium debt every year we had invested \$5 million in light industry and \$30 million in the schools?

Other Jobs

There are other jobs besides manufacturing. There is plenty of work to be done. We just don't want to pay for it. Three big

categories are infrastructure, green jobs and service jobs.

We need a new sewer system. We need road repair, expanded light rail, bridge repair, fast trains to Chicago and Kansas City, etc.

We need to retrofit public buildings to make them more energy efficient. We need to make and install windmills, solar panels and heat pumps. We need to make our own homes more energy efficient.

We need lots of service workers, but the big category is care-givers. There is no reason care-givers should be paid less per hour than manufacturing assembly-line workers. This bears repeating. There is no reason care-givers should be paid less per hour than manufacturing assembly-line workers.

Like manufacturing, the issues surrounding these jobs are not particular to St. Louis. Every city has its own story, but all the roads seem to lead to poverty and unemployment.

So What Do We Do

First, I think, talk to working people. Listen to them. Support them. It's not a political discussion. It's local, not a problem for the president of the United States.

Second. It is about jobs. The political candidates are right about that. But it is also about government. And it is about neighbors. What kind of work is available within walking distance of your house? Do the children on your block see adults going to work? Many children in the city don't.

Third, don't be a snob about jobs. When I was the director of COPE, a prisoner re-entry program, a man in the neighborhood insisted on being invited to talk to our residents about getting a job. To my surprise and initial horror, the jobs he spoke about were fast food jobs. But I listened. And I understood that these are good starter jobs, they offer on-the-job training, even in management, and sometimes they suit as permanent jobs, careers even.

Look at those work sites you pass by. What do they have to offer? The car wash and the salon that braids hair on the low wage end moving up to the machine shop and the law office – probably the machine shop pays better. My point is, know what's on offer.

If you find a job lead, call up Karen House and tell us.

Read E.F. Schumacher's Small Is Beautiful. His "issues of scale" struck deep responsive chords within me and, to this day, I resonate to opportunities for adjusting the scale of our economy down to manageable size. I think we have a big opportunity now to make some adjustments in the scale of U.S. participation in the global economy, beginning with support of machine job shops and cookie factories in our neighborhoods.

Last but not least, let's let the Rams go. Don't pour good money after bad. If the super rich want to save the team, they can go for it. ✚



Photo - Khalid Al Haqqan

Education in St. Louis

by **Maureen Filter Nolan & Thomas M. Nolan**

Like many cities across the United States, education in St. Louis has a history of success and failure, growth and decline, dynamism and stagnation. St. Louis schools have been a path to academic and financial accomplishment, or a channel to failure and poverty, or a mixture of both. And unlike many cities, the history of education in St. Louis is not just the story of its public school system – it is a tale that also includes an unusual number of Roman Catholic schools, along with a modest number of Lutheran and other religious and secular private schools.

Schools in St. Louis – the first Catholic school opened in 1818 and the first public school some twenty years later – have a unique history. In many ways, innovation has been a hallmark of education in St. Louis. The first high school for African American students west of the Mississippi, the first kindergarten, the first vocational school – all were innovations made by the St. Louis Public Schools. Catholic schools were similarly pioneering: the first university west of the Mississippi, unique schools for special needs students, and the racial integration of parochial schools some seven years before the Brown decision have distinguished Catholic schools in St. Louis.

But the period since the end of World War II has been a time of rapid change, not all of it positive. For the public schools, a system with a history of continuous growth, the past six decades have witnessed a significant decline in enrollment: from a high of more than 100,000 students in 1950, the public schools now enroll fewer than 27,000 students. Similarly, Catholic school enrollment has been in decline for more than 40 years and now tallies fewer than 7,000 students in elementary and secondary schools.

And along with smaller enrollments, schools in St. Louis have experienced other major changes. One striking shift is the level of poverty of students and their families. Currently, more than 82% of the students in the public schools are eligible for free or reduced cost meals, the common indicator of

student poverty. As families have exited the City (St. Louis' population peaked in the 1950's at over 850,000 and now is just under 320,000) a disproportionate number of low-income children now attend the St. Louis Public Schools. Population shifts have also impacted the Catholic schools: more than 25 Catholic elementary schools have closed in the past 35 years.

An exception has been the publicly-financed charter schools (operated by independent groups and conducted with fewer regulations and oversight mechanisms) which now enroll more than 11,000 students.

As is the case in so much of St. Louis' history, race has been a major factor. As required by the Missouri constitution, the St. Louis public schools were racially segregated until 1954. In the same vein, as a result of precedent and the directives of archbishops, Catholic schools were segregated until 1947 when then-Archbishop Joseph Ritter mandated racial integration. A history of segregation, a significant in-migration of African Americans through the 50s and 60s, an out-migration of whites and middle class citizens of all races, and a decline in academic performance have contributed to an educational environment that is fractured along the lines of race and, often, economic class.

There have been major efforts to bring diversity to a school district that is now nearly 85% African American. In one of the most sweeping plans in the nation, St. Louis public schools have been in a court-mandated desegregation program since the 1980's. Included in the plan are a range of magnet schools that offer specialized academic programs along with racially-balanced enrollments and a City-County transfer program that allows African American students to attend suburban school districts and brings white students into the City. But a program that once had over 16,000 students now serves fewer than 5,500, the vast majority of whom are black City students who ride busses each day to suburban schools.

Demographic factors – poverty, racial isolation, homelessness – have consequences for academic performance, with the most dependable predictors of academic achievement being family income and parents' educational attainment. The St. Louis



"Children in the City of St. Louis, especially those in poor families, must have greater access to early childhood education. Without such opportunities, they will forever be playing catch up with their better-prepared peers." Photo - Beth Buchek



Maureen has been a teacher, principal and administrator in Catholic and public schools in the City of St. Louis – and a proud member of the Cass House community. **Tom** helped found two Catholic schools in the City, served as a member of the St. Louis Board of Education and was director of the Archdiocesan Human Rights Office.

Public Schools rank 487 out of 503 on last year's state-mandated achievement tests and more than 20% of high school student drop out each year. At the same time, some of Missouri's very best schools are among the St. Louis Public Schools including Kennard (the highest performing elementary school in the state) and Metro High School (among the top 100 public high schools in the nation). Academic performance is less divided in the Catholic schools, in part because all charge tuition and most have enrollments with fewer than half of their students in poverty. And the newest educational offering – charter schools – have academic outcomes that are often similar, or inferior, to the public schools.

What does this mean for the children of St. Louis? What opportunities are there for a top-quality elementary and secondary education, one that prepares a student for success in post-secondary schools and for lives marked by self-sufficiency and service? It depends.

For students from middle- and upper-income families, options exist. Students from these families can attend a number of St. Louis Public Schools, especially the magnet schools and those with specialized curricula, and receive a level of instruction that leads to academic success in environments that are diverse, enriching and safe. Financially secure families also have the option of faith-based (primarily Catholic) and secular private schools which achieve similar results, either those in the City or those located in the suburbs. And in recent years, a number of middle-class families have sought out certain charter schools that have superior academic ratings.

There are more challenges for City children from low-income homes. For those with parents and guardians that seek out the successful public schools, there are solid and desirable opportunities. In a number of the magnet schools, in some specialized schools, and in some neighborhood and charter schools, students receive a solid education. And while many Catholic schools have closed, and many are financially inaccessible, there have been several positive developments. Six Catholic elementary schools have begun to serve low-income students exclusively. These schools employ a unique educational model that features a minimal tuition, a long school day, an extended school year, a demanding curriculum and financial and counseling support through high school. These schools have been notably successful in sending their graduates on to college-prep high schools. In addition, a reenergized scholarship program – which provides tuition grants to low-income students attending Catholic and other private schools – has made these schools more widely available.

But for students from low-income families where less attention is paid to education, where problems with employment, health, crime and negligence undercut the well-being of children, the picture is less encouraging. Too often these students are ill-prepared for school before they ever attend, and once they are in school they bring with them the difficulties that afflict their homes. They are the children who come to school tired, hungry, without homework fin-



St. Louis children "must have greater access to early childhood education... [This] investment will be far less expensive than the cost of academic failure - drop outs, incarceration, etc - that society will otherwise bear." Photo: Tom Cook

ished. And when there is a large concentration of such children in an individual school, the difficulty of achieving academic success is amplified. The concentration of high-need students is an enduring challenge for the mission of education in the City.

Separation and fragmentation is a characteristic of the St. Louis region. Our metropolitan community is divided by two major rivers, by the City-County split, by race, by class and by religion. This separation, needlessly perpetuated by self-interest, takes a dramatic toll on the low-income children in the City. When the largest school district in the state has an enrollment that is almost entirely poor, and minimally diverse, and no efforts are directed toward the underlying systemic causes, questions must be raised about the community's commitment to the common good, especially to the well-being of its neediest members.

What can be done to create better education for the children of St. Louis? Three areas are important:

1. Children in the City of St. Louis, especially those in poor families, must have greater access to early childhood education. Whether in child care facilities or schools, young children must be

provided with enriched development that enables them to enter kindergarten ready to learn. Without such opportunities, they will forever be playing catch up with their better-prepared peers. An investment in education at an early age will be far less expensive than the cost of academic failure – drop outs, incarceration, etc. – that society will otherwise bear.

2. There is a need for broader and more rigorous accountability for the proper administration and funding of the public and private schools that are educating children from low-income families. Teachers must teach, principals must lead, administrators must manage. At the same time, legislators must provide adequate regulations and funds, businesses must provide volunteers and corporate engagement, civic and religious organizations must look beyond their usual operations and become involved in the mission of education. Lackluster performance, whether by teachers or taxpayers, legislators or corporate leaders, cannot be tolerated.

3. The structural isolation of disadvantaged students must end. Maintaining a system of public school districts that result in aggregations of poor children, separated from others that enjoy economic stability, perpetuates poverty. Mixing children from low-income homes with those from middle- and upper-income homes results in moral, educational and social gains for all involved. So too with faith-based and other private schools which must avoid becoming islands of privilege; their commitment to social justice must be carried out structurally as well as school-by-school. The manner in which the total educational enterprise is framed has a profound impact on how well schools serve those in need. For poor children, schools are the most important institutions in their lives; all in the St. Louis community must accept responsibility for their structure and operation. ✚



From Karen House

by Ashleigh Packard and Stewart Minor

If you've ever stepped into Karen House then you know the joy and chaos that it can somehow embody simultaneously with all of its community members, volunteers, guests, and visitors from the neighborhood. Yet through all the movement, with the phone constantly ringing, or someone continuing to push the door bell, when you realize too late that we're out of toilet paper and no one showed up to cook dinner, there are so many lessons to learn (surely even different lessons for different people). And what a great lesson in love and humility this has all proved to be for me!

Amongst all the activity at Karen House I feel I am still trying to get my bearings, even after being a guest of the community for the past month or so. Because I've never lived in a community house before, and certainly not with so many people, the whole experience can at times be a bit overwhelming; yet, I can most always expect when bored to find a friend somewhere in the four story building that we all share and help run together. The happenings of this past month have been a bit dizzying, with so many friends, whether guests or community members, moving out and in. And between food runs, bike shop hours, open community meals, weekly mass, phone calls, food donations, clothing room times, keeping house, toilet paper runs, etc., it can be a bit of a challenge to keep up with the rules, traditions, expectations, nuances, and new and old faces. And yet the community members so often function with self-assurance, compassion, and efficiency in a way that I find quite admirable. What a gift to have moved among people from whom I have so much to learn! I only hope that I also can contribute in a way that is somehow meaningful.

While my partner, Stewart, and I continue to stay at Karen House, I enjoy the constant presence of others, and I think that when we move out soon I might actually miss waking up in the middle of the night to someone getting a midnight snack from the fridge, carrying on conversations with others while brushing teeth, or being caught in the middle of a strange looking yoga pose. I look forward, though, to our continued presence in the house whether that be tutoring, cooking meals, going on food runs, keeping house, or just taking out the compost. What a great place to continue to grow into my ideals! I'm so thankful that the Karen House community has given us both the opportunity to stay



A true Karen House Reunion - Katrina, Becky, Jim, Dorothy and family, Teka and Virginia

with them; it has been a learning and growing experience in ways I never expected! ✦

-Ashleigh

I came to St. Louis last August as part of a Catholic volunteer organization, the Gateway Vincentian Volunteers. Within the first few weeks of my stay in St. Louis a friend told me about Karen House, and invited me to one of the weekly Masses. Arriving at Karen House for the first time I thought I had the wrong address. I

did. I had arrived at the vacant St. Liborius church next door to Karen House. Before long I found the correct building and followed a small group of people to the third floor. After that first Karen House Mass, on my way out, I noticed a collection of bumper stickers and small signs posted to the right of the chapel door. Several of the stickers grappled for my attention, but one in particular grabbed my eye. A simple image of a woman, maybe Mary, with a child, maybe Christ, in her arms. Text printed neatly on the image read "And woman said This is my body, this is my blood". Those words stuck in my mind and drew me back to Karen house the next week for another Mass.

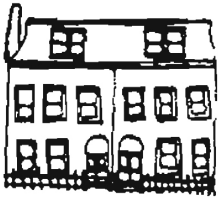
It wasn't long before I began taking house once a week. Other than the weekly Masses, which was my only peek into life on the third floor, life within the top floor was a mystery. Community members would ascend and descend squeaky stairs, coming down to interact then vanishing upward.

Time moved on, a whole year, and my term with the Gateway Vincentian Volunteers came to an end. I had become entangled in St. Louis due to ongoing projects across the city, and my growing love for the city itself. Around that same time my partner Ashleigh was coming up to St. Louis from Texas in order to work for a month at New Roots Urban Farm. With no reason to leave and a load of reasons to stay in St. Louis I asked the Karen House community if Ashleigh and I could have a spot, for a short time, on the third floor. The community agreed, Ashleigh and I moved in, and my perspective regarding the mysterious third floor changed- no longer a lofty keep, but a patch of peace in an otherwise overwhelming environment. ✦

-Stewart



During this past month here, **Ashleigh Packard** has enjoyed working at the New Roots Urban Farm, getting to know the Kabat House community better, rehabing a dilapidated building in our neighborhood, and contributing to Karen House in small ways. **Stewart Minor** is excited to have heat in their new apartment with St. Louis winter coming!



From Little House

by Mike Baldwin

Lyrics from "Seasons of Love" from the Musical *Rent*

*"Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Six hundred minutes,
Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Moments so dear.
Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Six hundred minutes
How do you measure, measure a year?"*

In addition, Little House is the hub for the Downtown Teens, a neighborhood workforce training and mentoring program started by Pruitt-Igoe Development eleven years ago.

*"How about love?
How about love?
How about love? Measure in love
Seasons of love. Seasons of love*



Liturgy at the Karen House 35th Anniversary Weekend. Photo - Annjie Schiefelbein

*Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Six hundred minutes!
Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Journeys to plan.*

*Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Six hundred minutes
How do you measure the life
Of a woman or a man?*

*In truths that she learned,
Or in times that he cried.
In bridges he burned,
Or the way that she died."*

We also try to provide support in other ways to our residents. This support has taken different approaches depending on the need of our residents. We have been pleased to see the many former guests of Little House and of the Downtown Teens return home over the years to say hi, give thanks, attend cook-outs, celebrate births, weddings and anniversaries.

Teka and I have occupied a unit in the four-family building known affectionately as Little House (but through the years has also been known as Ella Dickson house), for the past nine and a half years. We "inherited" the house from Mary Ann McGivern, SL, who was gifted the house from the last Dickson, some 30+ years ago.

Little House is a Catholic Worker house that includes economic participation (very low "rent") from the residents.

*"In daylights, in sunsets, in midnights
In cups of coffee
In inches, in miles, in laughter, in strife."*

We have provided economic assistance, decent housing, tutoring, mentoring, drug interventions, legal assistance, etc..

*"In five hundred twenty-five thousand
Six hundred minutes
How do you measure
A year in the life?"*

*"It's time now to sing out,
Tho' the story never ends
Let's celebrate
Remember a year in the life of friends
Remember the love!
Remember the love!
Seasons of love*

*Oh you got to got to
Remember the love!
You know that love is a gift from up above
Share love, give love spread love"*

Most if all, we hope we have carried on MAM's mission: to love. ✚



Mike Baldwin was a God-send during the recent Karen House rehab, lending his many skills and good humor to our efforts.



Catholic Worker Thought & Action

The First St. Louis Catholic Worker

by Jenny Truax

Do you remember when your life changed, or when your path was altered because you were in the right place at the right time with a soft heart and an open mind? We speak to hundreds of people, students, guests, volunteers, confirmations classes and neighbors who come through the Karen House doors. And we are reminded by these people day after day, that the smallest chance encounter can change our lives. We know it, too, because it has happened to each of us as well. When we keep a soft heart -- one that is open to God's call to us, to relationship, and to new habits of being -- our

enthusiastically covered the talk on the front page of the *UNews*, and following this talk, Cyril contacted the St. Louis subscribers of the New York CW paper, inviting them to form a group. Six or seven people showed up, including Bolen, and in July 1935 the first St. Louis Catholic Worker was quietly born. The group met regularly for discussion, dubbing themselves the "Campion Propaganda Committee." Member Don Gallagher described Campions as "discussion groups formed under the inspirations of the Catholic Worker."

Later, in the spring of 1936, the New York CW began its first farm and Cyril Echele spent several weeks there. He returned early after becoming embroiled in one of the farm's many altercations (Lack of farming experience, urban backgrounds, and difficulties with decision making were just a few of the difficulties faced by early CW farmers.) Coincidentally at this time, the St. Louis CW received a donation of 250 acres in the Ozarks, which they dubbed "CW Farming Community No. 2." With some background in farming, and a few weeks at the New York Farm under his belt, Cyril was the most experienced, so he moved there to begin the experiment. As it turned out, the soil was not very rich, and a devastating drought struck the Midwest that summer. Cyril remembered the experience as a "glorious failure," where he "almost starved to death and even my chickens died!" In a September letter to Dorothy Day, they declared the "CW Embryonic Agronomic University 'closed' for the season". Happily, the difficulty of this experiment didn't prevent other elements of the St. Louis CW from flourishing.

In the fall of 1936, the group finally acquired their own space, with help from Fr. Martin Hellreigel, who was later remembered as the "heart and soul of the St. Louis Catholic Worker". They started a bookstore, The Campion Book Shop (located across from the current VA Hospital on North Grand Blvd.) which competed in

a friendly way with a nearby Communist bookshop. The Workers began a soup-line, distributing day-old bread and donated coffee, and held weekly discussions on personalism, liturgy, and economics. Still in the midst of the Depression, labor and unemployment provided a pressing backdrop to their discussions.

In the winter, the CW began publishing a newsletter titled *Catholic Alliance*; Bolen Carter was a major contributor. A loose



Dorothy Day's visit in June 1939. From left in back: Skip (guest), Rev. Leo Byrne' unknown priest, Dave Dunne, Rev. Joseph Huels, William Dooley (guest), Cyril Echele, Margaret Echele, Josephine Brennan. Kneeling: Dorothy O'Brien, Evelyn Gilsinn, Dorothy Day. Photo courtesy of Marquette University Archives.

lives can be transformed in wonderful and unexpected ways. The story of St. Louis' first Catholic Worker (CW) provides an inspiring example of this phenomenon.

Soon after graduating, Cyril Echele, along with 800 others, attended a lecture by Dorothy Day at Saint Louis University (SLU). Dorothy encouraged the SLU community to begin a house of hospitality, soup-line or discussion group. SLU student Bolen Carter



Jenny Truax is hoping Dorothy Day was right when she said "the walls will expand to make room for more, " because she and Annjie's "foster" dog Daisy seems here to stay.

affiliation of folks with a shared vision and passion, these early Catholic Workers were remembered as a "starry-eyed group full of enthusiasm" by Echele. The CW never received any official Archdiocesan support, but like many other houses, it was enthusiastically supported by individual priests and Bishops.

These Catholic Workers were especially interested in translating spiritual life into social action. In 1937, they supported the sit-down strike at Emerson Electric, visiting strikers and holding discussions on the Catholic Social Teachings on labor. The group worked on race issues, advocating for the desegregation of St. Louis University, and providing doctrine classes for the people of the "colored" Catholic parish, St. Elizabeth. The Workers would often travel together to different St. Louis parishes, looking for "good" liturgy, (To put this into perspective, Ann and Bolen Carter noted that this meant "If the priest would turn around to say 'Dominus Vobiscum' and we could get the people to say 'Et cum spiritu tuo', that was real participation!")

In the winter, Herb Welsh from the New York CW moved to St. Louis, providing the support for the group to start doing hospitality. They opened a three-story house on Pine Street in 1938 across from SLU's College Church, naming it "St. Louis Hospice." Although only one or two members actually lived in these houses, the group was at its most active during this time, doing hospitality for 20 men, feeding 150 people in the soup line, and holding weekly discussions. In late 1940, the CW moved again, to a duplex at 312 South Duchouquette Street, a poorer neighborhood in Soulard near the Mississippi River, where the number of people fed and being housed increased even more.

The CW movement was impacted dramatically by World War II, in fact, it barely survived. Between 1941 and 1945, subscriptions to the New York CW paper fell from 190,000 to 50,000, and the number of houses dropped from 32 to 10. St. Louis was among the houses that closed. While Workers in St. Louis did feel lukewarm towards the pacifism of Dorothy Day and the New York house, this wasn't the primary factor for the house's closing. People in the St. Louis Catholic Worker were moving on - getting married, being drafted, finding new jobs in the booming war-time economy, and gaining new responsibilities in young families. In 1942, with not enough people to run the house, the CW closed its doors, ending the first chapter of the continuing story of the St. Louis CW.

Rather than a simplistic story of success or failure, the history of the Catholic Worker movement is more of a story of experiments building on one another, of stumbles and fits, of alternately broken and open hearts, of transformation. "If I hadn't found the Catholic Worker, it's hard telling what I would have done," Cyril Echele said years later. Evelyn Gilsinn remembers that "Once I heard Dorothy speak, I could never feel the same way about self-indulgence again." Another founder said that "I don't think there's been a stronger influence in our lives."

After the St. Louis CW's official closing, so many of these original Workers continued to seek a soft heart, leading incredible lives of service and justice. Several community members continued to meet after the house closed; the St. Louis Logos Study Group began meeting in 1943, and continued to discuss social justice and faith for over 40 years. Ann and Bolen Carter, true inspirations who did work for years in East St. Louis, helped in the formation of Karen House, and continued to support the house until their



St. Louis Hospice was on Pine Street across from College Church. There, Catholic Workers did hospitality for 20 men, hosted a soup line and weekly Round Table discussions.

Photo: Marquette Catholic Worker Archives

deaths with visits, advice, donations (including the much-loved weekly farm-fresh egg donation), and prayers.

When we have a soft heart, we never know when the smallest encounter – with someone on the street, a great speaker like Dorothy Day, or a friend of many years – might open up new paths and possibilities for us. These early Catholic Workers inspire us today, much in the same way that they themselves described being inspired by Dorothy Day back in 1935: "It is often said that great people open visions for us - show us the way, not to imitate them, but to become ourselves more fully. Dorothy was a visionary for us, but a practical, hardheaded one who acted on what she believed and helped us all to change our lives, to care enough about others to take risks."

Sources and Further Reading

1. The concept of the soft heart comes from Pema Chodron in When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times
2. "Remembering Bolen Carter" by Pat Coy: <http://karenhousecw.org/EconomicsonaHumanScale.htm>
3. The Catholic Worker After Dorothy: Practicing the Works of Mercy in a New Generation by Dan McKanan
4. "An Oral History of the St. Louis Catholic Worker: 1935-1942" by Janice Brandon-Falcone in Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the Catholic Worker, ed. Pat Coy

The Round Table

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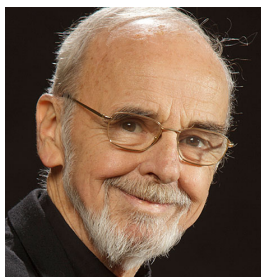
We welcome your donations and participation!

As Catholic Workers, our hospitality to the homeless is part of an integrated lifestyle of simplicity, service, and resistance to oppression, all of which is inherently political. For this reason, we are not a tax-exempt organization. Furthermore, we seek to create an alternative culture where giving is celebrated and human needs are met directly through close personal relationships. Thus, all of our funding comes from individuals like you who share yourself and your funds so that this work can go on.

We rejoice in the life of our dear friend and mentor, **John Kavanaugh, SJ.**, who passed away on November 5, 2012. John was a part of the life of Karen House since the very beginning. His tremendous and generous spirit will continue to be gifts to us, despite this great loss.

We take comfort from John's homily at the funeral mass of Ann Manganaro: "And so, what would Ann then say to us who grieve about this wide wound of death, over this great wound of space that separates us now from Ann and all those who have passed into the other world? I think it would be the words of a poem she wrote over ten years ago. Its final lines are these:

'And all the space between us
Is filled and flowing with Love,
And the wider the space, by
God's
bounty,
The larger the grace thereof''



Karen House Announcements

Christmas is Coming - please check out our website for ways to get involved, and join us for Midnight Mass - 11pm Christmas Eve.

Survey: Share Your Thoughts on the RoundTable

Feel free to mail, email, or call us with your reflections on these questions:

In the past few years, we've done these issues: *Occupy and the CW, Appropriate Technology, Building Thriving Communities, Hospitality, Afghanistan, Storytelling, Peter Maurin, and Distributism.*

Which topics have you found memorable, inspiring, or helpful? Your reflections here:

What has been less engaging?

What topics or ideas would you like us to address?

Do you have additional people we should add to our RT mailing list?

Thanks to all those who helped with the Rehab!

We had dozens of volunteers work hundreds of hours to fix up the house. Our floors are fixed and waxed, the guest rooms look great, and our 3rd floor community room now has a beautiful kitchen.

Check www.KarenHouseCW.org for updates on Karen House, information on the Catholic Worker, an archive of past Round Tables, and more!