

# The Picture the Homeless Oral History Project

Don't Talk About Us: Talk With Us!

## The Civil Rights Committee



*Duwon Bryant, Jean Rice, and John Jones, PTH Civil Rights End Disorderly Conduct Campaign, street theatre at One Police Plaza. June 15, 2010*

The founding of Picture the Homeless (PTH) was catalyzed by the brutality of the NYPD warrant squad waking, beating, and arresting homeless men in the middle of the night, sparking Anthony Williams and Lewis (Lou) Haggins into action in November of 1999.

Lynn Lewis began volunteering with PTH after meeting Anthony and Lou in January of 2000 at CHARAS. Since the early 1990's she had served on the civil rights workgroup of the National Coalition of the Homeless and learning from folks like Paul Boden, then with the Coalition on Homelessness in San Francisco. (COHSF) Emily Givens was sleeping in the streets in the West Village and an early leader at PTH. She, Anthony, and Lynn founded the civil rights committee after returning from a visit to COHSF in 2001. Jean Rice soon after joined PTH, and was "immediately drafted" into the civil rights committee.

PTH's civil rights committee launched several campaigns over the years. At their root was the call to end selective enforcement of Quality of Life violations or simple bullying to remove homeless folks from public space. Fundamental to this work was the importance of homeless New Yorkers representing themselves and PTH, visibly and powerfully.

Using direct action, civil disobedience, Know Your Rights training, public education, documenting police harassment, suing the NYPD twice, and organizing and educating within coalitions to prohibit profiling by the NYPD based on housing status through the landmark legislation known as the Community Safety Act, PTH consistently organized to ensure homeless New Yorkers right to public space because civil rights is fundamentally about dignity and basic humanity. This zine contains some of the highlights of this work and the thinking behind it, based on oral history interviews with PTH Civil Rights campaign leaders, former staff, allies, and archival materials and public documents.



**Jean Rice:** It is so similar to the era in America, when America wasn't so great, during a period when the Fugitive Slave Act was the law of the land.

Because now, homeless people are treated like fugitive slaves. If you've got a shopping cart with personal belongings in it, you appear to be homeless, and you're targeted in public space.

The same way that police agents, during the era of the Fugitive Slave Act, targeted people of color who had a stick over their shoulder with their meager belongings tied to the stick, that stick has now become a shopping cart.

And the police mission has not changed enough to satisfy this citizen from era of The Fugitive Slave Act, to current.

And, as a founding member of the Picture the Homeless civil rights committee, I say that all New York City citizens, whether domiciled or undomiciled, should be equal before the law.



**Anthony Williams:** So, they did a sweep, a whole, all-out assault on the homeless population. People living in boxes—wherever there was homeless people, they were targeted, and roused up. I mean, we even went to *other* shelters to find out that they were doing the same raids.

So, the incident that happened was, he [Lou Haggins] was in a three-man room, and Russell was on one side. Lou was on this side, then it was another guy on the other side. There was three of them.

The Warrant Squad came in, made him get out of bed, roused him up, slammed him up against the wall. I mean, they really roughed him up. And Lou watched it, and came over to me at like three in the morning, pissed, “We got to do something about this.”

I’m like, “What?” “They just beat up a homeless guy, that was sleeping right across from me.” I said, “But that’s nothing new.” He goes, “No! No. We got to do something about this, Anthony.”

“So, what are we going to do? I mean, this is what they do! This is the shelter. This is the norm. This is what they do. If the Warrant Squad come in, and wake you up out of bed, and if you attempt to resist or whatever, then you get an ass whooping, and that’s what you get, because you’re homeless. You get what you deserve, right? An ass whooping.”

“No.” Lou said, “No! No. It’s just wrong. *I watched them* beat this guy up, with no clothes on, just in his underwear, okay? *No*. This is just—we got to do something, Anthony.” And so, I was like, “Well, I don’t know what we could do. You know what I mean? Like, what?” And so, that’s when I went, decided to go with him to WBAI.



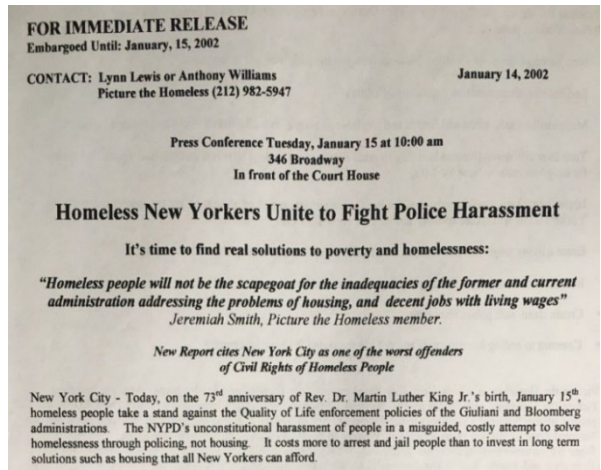
*Anthony Williams and Lou Haggins. Winter, 2000*

**Charley Heck:** December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1996. I was arrested for trespassing inside a bank that I had a live bank account in. I think I was sleeping on a floor. That winter was called “the winter of sixteen storms.” They [the police] told me that, “It was a violation of the Quality of Life.”

Well, you know, I’ve had various scrapes with the law for various offenses, and I tell the police nothing! So, I went through the process, and I went before the judge, and the judge gave me an ACD [Adjournment in Contemplation of Dismissal]. He would release me from custody, and if I didn’t commit any more crime for six months, this incident would be erased from my record. So I accepted the deal.

Then what happened? I took the police department and the City of New York to court. I won the case. I’m a homeless man living on the street! I won a case against the City of New York and the police department! They awarded me eight thousand dollars... But! It took the city comptroller *seven years to sign the check.*

PTH moved into our first office space at Judson Memorial Church in March of 2001, and began general membership meetings every Wednesday night. Four people came to the first meeting. Ending police harassment was the main issue that folks wanted to work on. PTH continued doing outreach, listening to homeless New Yorkers, and inviting them to general membership meetings. During this time, we also held actions protesting the NYPD's removal of homeless folks from public space, meeting other grassroots groups in NYC, and monitoring media coverage of homelessness and homeless folks in NYC.



*One of Bloomberg's first action was "Operation Clean Sweep", including homelessness as one of the "7 City Sins", calling folks engaged in a range of less than misdemeanor conduct "public pests."*

Newly elected Mayor Bloomberg declared war on homeless New Yorkers immediately after taking office in 2002. Six of us travelled to San Francisco in February 2002 and met with the Coalition on Homelessness in San Francisco to learn from other homeless folks how they were organizing. As the only other homeless-led group in the country that we knew of, they were an early, natural ally throughout PTH's history.



**Paul Boden:** I remember that trip mainly because I thought it was so fucking cool. There was this real sense of wanting to see Picture the Homeless kick fucking ass and feeling like this is fucking cool. Because it's still my hometown, you know? So, I was really energized about the people that came out to talk about doing it, and this absolute belief system that they were going to do it. There was never a question in my mind that these guys weren't going to do the shit.

That was the same experience I had when I first met Denver Homeless Out Loud folks. It was very clear there was a fucking plan afoot. They didn't know exactly what the plan was but there was a plan to do this shit. And so, it was just exciting! It was like, you get to share your shit with somebody who's actually going to do the shit, not just talk to you about what you do and why you do it but someone who's going to be doing the same kind of shit that you're talking about. And I think the more we can share... They'll end up doing whatever the fuck they want. But to be able to actually talk to a group of people with the same belief systems and talk about the freedom of just start stirring some shit. Like, you'll figure it out as you go. If you listen to people, you'll figure it out. But just start doing something! Don't just have meetings to talk about doing something.

**Anthony Williams:** When I went to San Francisco, I was amazed, just at the civil rights stuff, and I knew that if this is what homeless people are asking for, this is what we should give. I mean, that's how we determine, you know? It was no miracle for them to talk about the police, and talk about how they felt about selective enforcement, and treated *differently*.

They had a lot to offer Picture the Homeless. They had *a lot* of things that they worked on and were very strong with, and I think it was important for us to see. Instead of me seeing it, I wanted everybody else to see it too.

I think it was important that they got to see *an organization* that was run by homeless and formerly homeless folks, to see that they're actually doing it. It could be done, and it was being done! They won a lawsuit! That was one of the most important pieces I think I took out of that. They actually got the mayor's office and the city to pay for people's belongings being taken, illegally and thrown in the trash.



## 2002: THE CIVIL RIGHTS COMMITTEE

**Jean Rice:** So, when we went to the meeting, I was introduced as Warren Prince's cousin—because Prince had come to a preceding meeting. They knew him but didn't know me. And immediately I struck up a relationship with three members. I mean there were about eight people at the meeting, but three of them I bonded with *instantly*, Emily Givens, Gina Hunt, and my sister Lynn Lewis.



And it was a mutual bonding, because during the course of the meeting, a discussion about the Fourteenth Amendment arose and the three people I just mentioned were impressed about my knowledge about Constitutional law. Then the three of them instantly drafted me to the civil rights committee, which is the first committee my beloved Picture the Homeless ever established.



**Paul Boden:** I think the civil rights shit is a common thread of the groups that are doing organizing in a way where they're not afraid to fight. I think that the two issue areas that we've identified amongst our members wasn't unique to the West Coast. The displacement and gentrification and the housing shit and the civil rights shit are impacting all of our members, whether you're a family, whether you're a single adult, whether you're youth, whether you're disabled, whether you're—whatever.



## **2002: PTH'S FIRST CIVIL RIGHTS CAMPAIGN: "WHOSE QUALITY OF LIFE?!"**

PTH's civil rights committee declared "zero tolerance for any police practices or government policies that criminalize homeless people for being in public spaces." PTH identified

multiple tactics to end the selective enforcement of Quality of Life violations. These included outreach, direct action, civil disobedience, street theatre, documentation/surveys, developing Know Your Rights educational materials, linking with other homeless organizing groups nationally, attending public forums to directly challenge policies, changing negative media stereotypes, and organizing to ensure that homeless folks were speaking for themselves. These became the fundamental components of PTH's organizing model and culture.



*Lou Haggins, PTH co-founder, delivering report card to Mayor Michael Bloomberg, 2003. His sign says "Public Parks are for the People!"*

**Lynn Lewis:** Prince and Jean were there by then, so there was brilliance and there was some chaos. Because our goal—and to call Emily Givens into this—was to be welcoming. Because everywhere else that homeless folks went was not welcoming.

It was, "Get the fuck out of here. No, you can't use the bathroom." And when you say to somebody, "No, you can't use the bathroom." You're also saying, "I don't care if you pee on yourself. You cannot use this bathroom. I don't care! You cannot use it." Human beings have to go to the bathroom. Like basic life-sustaining activities, you can't do? You can't sleep? What are you saying to somebody when you say, "Wake up, you need to move?" You're denying their humanity.



## 2002: NYC POLICE WATCH

Come to a free legal clinic and talk to a lawyer.

*Meet other people homeless people who are ready to stand up for their rights. Contact us if you get a ticket or have any contact with the police that you feel is wrong.*

**It is not Illegal to be  
homeless!**

**Know Your Rights!**

Picture the Homeless and NYC Police Watch are holding free legal clinics on Thursday afternoons from 1 to 5 at Judson Memorial Church. 55 Washington Square So., corner of Thompson St, across from bathrooms in Washington Square Park

*PTH Civil Rights Committee free legal clinic with NYC Police Watch of the Ella Baker Center. 2002*

Civil Rights Committee members meet with Ajamu Sankofa of NYC Police Watch who begins holding a Legal Clinic for homeless New Yorkers harassed by the police, beginning in March 2002. Know Your Rights (KYR) with the police was a core tactic of the civil rights committee. Successive legal clinics were held and KYR materials distributed at Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, a sidewalk legal clinic at 125<sup>th</sup> and Lexington next to Pathmark was held on Saturdays and KYR trainings were held for PTH members and at shelters from 2002 onward.



## **2002: CIVIL RIGHTS FREEDOM SUMMER and Participatory Action Research Project**

Picture the Homeless members, staff and volunteers interviewed 503 homeless New Yorkers over the summer of 2002 throughout the borough of Manhattan to document police harassment and to ask homeless folks “what they wanted.” Survey questions were developed by the civil rights committee members, trainings were held on survey techniques, and there were weekly collective analysis of surveys.



**Charley Heck:** I was arrested one time, and I went before the judge, and *I refused to accept the ACD*. So back and forth, between talking with the attorney and going before the judge and refusing the judge's offer and going back and talking to the attorney again... I went back and forth in front of the judge about three or four times until the judge finally says, "Take him to the psychiatric ward in Bellevue Hospital."

After two weeks in Bellevue Hospital, the doctors couldn't find anything wrong with me, so they had to release me. That was another incident. So now, I talked about two incidents with the police, but there must be *several dozens* of times that I had altercations with the police.



**Lynn Lewis:** After we did our own survey project, echoing Paul Boden, we really increased our membership. That's when Bruce [Little] and all them started coming to the meetings. We really would have like twenty, twenty-five people in the membership meetings and it would be chaotic, you know? We'd have people in the meetings who didn't even know really what the mission was, and it was a way, hopefully, for them *to get it*. But there was no guarantee. Sometimes people would be exhausted. Sometimes, people would be kind of falling asleep.

***Whose Quality of Life?:***

*"The number of homeless people arrested for such offenses (public nuisance laws) this year has increased by more than 300%"*

— NYPD Commissioner Kelly N.Y. Times 10/13/02

***IS YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE  
GETTING BETTER?***

**Picture the Homeless**

*Organizing for Justice and Respect: Don't Talk About Us, talk With Us!*  
(212) 982-5947

# 2002: CIVIL RIGHTS COMMITTEE REPORT

The findings from the 503 surveys collected over the summer of 2002 continued to echo throughout PTH's civil rights work. PTH released its first Participatory Action Research Project during an action in One Penn Plaza, *Pattern and Practice: Systemic Violations of the Civil Rights of Homeless New Yorkers by the NYPD, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Commissioner Ray Kelly, NYPD.*

## 2002 Report Findings:

81% report that they have been harassed or bothered just because they are homeless.

81% report that police or parks police have engaged in selective enforcement of laws or parks regulations, leaving others alone.

63% report that they have been stopped and frisked for no reason.

61% report that they have been issued a summons or arrested for doing things because they are homeless.

46% report that the NYPD, parks police or sanitation workers have taken property away in violation of their rights to due process.

People of color who are homeless often report that they feel that the harassment and selective enforcement is a result both racial profiling and homeless status.

Police routinely tell homeless people that they have to leave public spaces or threaten people with arrest for being in a public area.

Interactions with the police include verbal threats, verbal abuse, being awakened and told to move out of their precinct, or to move along, to physical contact including being hit with radios, night sticks, or nudged or kicked.

Homeless people in public spaces were frequently reluctant to speak with survey teams if we visibly carried our clipboards because we were perceived as outreach workers.

A significant number of people interviewed would not speak with us until we assured them that they did not have to give their social security number or other identifying information, reporting fear of further harassment or retaliation.

When people were asked “what did they want and when did they want it” many replied that they wanted concrete outcomes such as housing or a job, but a significant number of respondents stated that they wanted respect, justice, or compassion.



"The number of homeless people arrested for such offenses (public nuisance laws) this year has increased by more than 300%!"  
-NYPD Commissioner Kelly N.Y. Times 10/13/02

**SIT IN**  
**PROTEST POLICE HARASSMENT**  
**OF HOMELESS PEOPLE**  
**in Public Parks !!!**

**One Penn Plaza**  
Thursday, November 7, 2002  
10am to 1pm

Police are throwing the public out of public parks saying "Homeless Don't Belong in the Parks". Resister Picture the Homeless  
"Just Because a Person is Homeless, Doesn't Mean He/She is Excluded from the Public" Member, Picture the Homeless

**Picture the Homeless**  
Organizing for Justice and Respect: Don't Talk About Us, talk WITH Us!  
1-212-693-7643

*PTH Civil Rights Committee members didn't want their names public, due to concerns about retaliation before the action but then were fired up and spoke with the media.*

*John Jones, Jean Rice, PTH Civil Rights Committee.*

**Kazembe Balagun:** The sense of daring that PTH had was unusual because my critique of the movement sometimes is that there's a sense of, "Well, if you're undocumented or you're a woman of color or you're a Black person you should not be taking risks in terms of getting arrested, or challenging, or doing a direct action, or being in the front part of rallies. You should be more in the background and be more scared and stuff like that. And I feel like that type of philosophy has actually disempowered people from taking leadership, and moving forward and taking risks and doing stuff.



**Willie Baptist:** That a section of the population, especially the poor and homeless that are in these major cities that are undergoing this accelerated gentrification, which is essentially an anti-homeless, an anti-poor campaign. In order to facilitate pushing people out, they have to give a distorted picture that isolates them. You know, in history and in political strategy, or even military strategy, you never attack that which you haven't isolated first. So, you have to dehumanize it. You have to put it in a position where it is a separate people over here and then when the attack comes, nobody comes to your aid.





# 2002: PTH'S FIRST NYPD LAWSUIT

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

PICTURE THE HOMELESS, INC.,

Plaintiff,

"DOE STEIN  
vs.

The CITY OF NEW YORK and RAYMOND  
KELLY, Commissioner of the New York City  
Police Department,

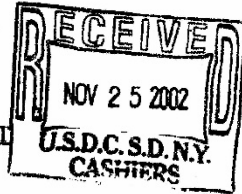
Defendants.

02 CV 9379

COMPLAINT

02 Civ.

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT



1. This is an action to vindicate the civil rights of the homeless in New York City. Sometime in mid-October 2002, following media reports of increasing numbers of homeless persons appearing on City streets, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) initiated a program of targeting the homeless for arrest. Pursuant to that initiative, the NYPD substantially increased the size of the Department unit responsible for interacting with the homeless and instructed the members of that unit that their primary mission no longer was to offer services to get homeless people off the street but instead was to arrest the homeless. Moreover, members of the unit were instructed to single out the homeless for arrest for offenses for which non-homeless persons were not to be arrested. In just the first month of this homeless-arrest initiative, the NYPD's Homeless Outreach Unit has arrested approximately 250 homeless people for minor offenses. Many of the arrested homeless have been held overnight in jail and upon information and belief have lost their personal property or had it destroyed.

# Organization for Homeless Sues Police Over Jump in Arrests

By AL BAKER

An organization founded by homeless people announced yesterday that it was suing the New York Police Department for what it called a deliberate policy of singling out the homeless for arrest.

The New York Civil Liberties Union filed a nine-page lawsuit on behalf of the organization, *People's Homeless Inc.*, charging that a sharp increase in the number of homeless people over the last month reflected selective enforcement of the law as well as a "hostile attitude" on the city's homeless population.

The lawsuit, filed yesterday in

Federal District Court in Manhattan, seeks to have a federal judge declare the department's policy of arresting homeless people unconstitutional and order it to stop, said Christopher T. Dunn, the associate legal director of the civil liberties group.

The increase in arrests of homeless people, on charges varying from minor violations to felonies, underlines the city's more aggressive handling of a population that many advocates say is growing rapidly. Recently, the department merged two units concerned with the homeless and assigned about 50 officers to the new agency, the Homeless Outreach Unit.

A spokesman for Police Commis-

sioner Raymond W. Kelly, who was named as a defendant in the suit, declined to comment yesterday. Mr. Kelly has said that the increase in arrests stemmed from more frequent encounters between homeless people and officers. Moreover, the new unit have brought more homeless people to inmate and health facilities for the homeless, city officials said.

The underlying accusation of the lawsuit is that the department has shifted its policy, from assisting the homeless by directing them to shelters and offering them a variety of social services, to singling them out for arrest.

Two people arrested by the police said yesterday that officers had apologized before taking them into custody. "The officers said the mayor is making their supervisors arrest the homeless because they are in need," said Robert Washington, 35, who said he was arrested at Pennsylvania Station two weeks ago for sleeping under a train platform.

The suit contends that officers in the new unit, acting on orders from supervisors, have arrested about 750 homeless people in about a month. Mr. Dunn said those arrests were charged because they were being on the policy that officers have changed is unconstitutional.

If the Police Department were out there arresting everyone on the park bench, that might not be unconstitutional," Mr. Dunn said.

"We are not saying they can't enforce the law," Mr. Dunn said. "What we are saying is, they can't enforce the law only against the homeless. They have to enforce the law evenly against the rich as well as the poor."

The lawsuit contends that prosecutors have refused to prosecute a significant number of the arrests made by the new police unit. Barbara Thompson, a spokeswoman for the Manhattan district attorney, Robert M. Kennedy, declined to comment specifically on that charge.

What is happening is we are reviewing, as we do in any case, the charges," she said. "If in fact the only charge is that a person is homeless, that is not a crime and we cannot charge that. If in fact a person who is homeless happens to commit a crime, obviously then we will charge them."

## The New York Times

### City Agrees to Settle Lawsuit Over Homeless, Lawyers Say

By BENJAMIN WEISER

New York City has agreed to settle a lawsuit that accused the Police Department of adopting a deliberate policy of singling out homeless people for arrest, according to court reports and lawyers involved.

As part of the settlement, the department has sent out detailed directives to one unit that focuses on the homeless as well as to the Transit Police, whose thousands of officers patrol the subway.

Violations are to be enforced evenly against any person observed violating the law," one directive says, "regardless of whether the person is homeless or not."

Another document, a memorandum to Transit Bureau commanders, says: "The importance of nonselective enforcement cannot be overstated. Please ensure adherence and compliance at all times."

The proposed settlement will must be approved by a Federal District Court judge in Manhattan. In rejecting the agreement, the city said it did not concede any liability and denied the allegations in the lawsuit.

The suit was filed in November by an advocacy group called *People's Homeless Inc.*, which was represented by the New York Civil Liberties Union. The suit accused the department of shifting its policy of assisting homeless people into shelters and offering them social services to arresting them, and in some cases jailing them overnight.

The suit called a sharp increase in the number of arrests of homeless people last fall, and called for a "hostile attitude" on homeless people.

Christopher Dunn, associate legal director of the civil liberties group, said yesterday that with the settlement, the department "has failed its obligation of singling out the homeless for arrest."

"We commended the city for taking this action, but this campaign should have never started, and it should not have taken a lawsuit to stop it," Mr. Dunn said.

A lawyer for the city said that although the city had agreed to send out the directives, the city maintains that no new policy of selective enforcement has ever been instituted, and that the increase in arrests merely reflects a sharp increase in the number of encounters between officers and homeless people.

"There were more arrests because there was more activity," the lawyer, Carl Donoghue, special assistant to the corporation counsel said. She described the directives as "a confirmation of our existing policy and practice."

The policy was and is, as part of Police Department training and procedures, that people are treated the same," Mr. Donoghue said. "But we didn't have those things written out."

"It is our policy," she added. "We have no reason not to write it down."

A police spokesman had no additional comment.

The lawsuit charged that after reports in the news media last fall about a significant increase in the number of homeless people on the streets, top police officials directed the Homeless Outreach Unit to change its mission, from one of offering services to arrest. The suit said that officers had also been told that they were not to enforce the law in a particular manner against people who were not homeless.

The new directives have been read aloud at 10 consecutive roll calls of the Homeless Outreach Unit and the Transit Bureau, sent distributed to individual officers, the documents show.

They also offer guidance to members of the Homeless Outreach Unit when carrying out their duties. For example, if an officer finds a person stretched out on a subway seat or a park bench, the officer must first take appropriate corrective action.

"If the violator is homeless, the member will first offer social services prior to any enforcement action," the directives say.

If the homeless person refuses the offer of services but still shows a valid identification, the officer is expected to issue a summons. If the person cannot produce an identification, the officer is to make an arrest.

The same process will be followed if the person is not homeless, the directives state.

Members of the group that filed the suit said they were pleased at the proposed settlement. One, Michael Williams, who described himself as currently homeless, said the agreement "will be officers know what I'm human just like everybody else."

"We do have rights," he added. "They overlook them at times."

THIS NEW YORK TIMES METRO TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 1983

## 2003: CREATING OUT OWN MEDIA

**Betty Yu:** So, it was probably 2003 and we'd have an orientation first, before launching into the camera workshops. I just remember meeting folks and just really being inspired immediately. I was really struck by how open folks were with their stories. And I remember the pride that they had in terms of being a part of the organizing work and their analysis.

There were at least ten to twelve people there. I remember people talking about the civil rights campaign, the criminalizing of homeless folks just existing and being on the street and folks wanting to tell their own stories and particularly telling stories about how there is an organization basically that is doing organizing, from the bottom up, and principles around self-determination and around policy change—again, from the bottom up.

You know, it was the first time that I had even thought about it to be honest. Personally, it was a powerful moment for me. When we talk about organizing I feel like they're one of the groups that are the marginalized of the marginalized, right? We often don't think about them being agents of change themselves. I have to say that that's something I never really thought about deeply, until I encountered the organization and reading about the organization and then meeting the folks.

Obviously it sounds corny, but putting a human face on the issue was very impactful for me. It definitely left me with a really powerful impression of the power that folks have, particularly homeless folks—to really organize and demand policy change and demand change, right?

And I remember we got feedback from folks about PTH's pieces—quite a bit, because I don't think people are used to seeing homeless folks in that way. So, you have a stereotype,

right? That they look a certain way, they talk a certain way, and so on, and so forth. And to show folks in this light of like—extremely smart and thoughtful and actually critiquing the system and understanding the conditions and what has to change in order for folks to achieve the goals and to change the system—end homelessness, and all that. Like, understanding it systemically.



**Lynn Roberts:** This is all before the community land trust work and all those campaigns. So the early days were, the Human [Civil] Rights Campaign, the Canning... Like every one of your campaigns that you could mention, I witnessed from a relative distance, but each one of them just blew me away! I just knew it could open my students' eyes to things, you know? I didn't know how strategic you could be with organizing, until I encountered Picture the Homeless.



**Willie Baptist:** I remember a meeting. I had to go upstairs... It was an office space right next to Community Voices Heard, on 116<sup>th</sup>. I went there and didn't know what to expect. You know, I'd heard about it... But I mean, I seen homeless folks trying to figure out what to do, *planning*—about particular police brutality issues, all the different issues.

And that made me reflect on my experience of Homeless Union organizing. I was part of that homeless union organizing drive for the National Union of the Homeless. And I was very impressed with the fact that you had homeless folks, men, and women, who are there *planning their next action* based on, I think at that time it was dealing with police injustices or something like that, that they were trying to deal with at that stage.

And, there was no doubt who was the leadership of that process. When I came to that meeting with Picture the Homeless, I saw the same qualities, the same potential, and I was very excited about what they were talking about and what they were planning to do, and also their history. That was one encounter.



Leroy Parker, PTH Civil Rights Committee, Republican National Convention. August 2004

**Rob Robinson:** But the one thing that was constant was the meeting schedules. Those were the days when you saw the most people. Tuesdays was civil rights and Thursdays was the housing meeting. That's when you saw the people really come in. So that idea of, "If you're angry about it, come on this day—and come on this day, if you're about that" really worked.

## SELECTIVE ENFORCEMENT

**Jean Rice:** Picture the Homeless, along with a few other allies, were quick to point out that when you start a police state, you always start imposing these draconian policies against the people at the bottom of the socio-economic strata. I mean the Jews in Germany is a good example! First, the vagabonds and the hobos, then the intellectuals, and so on, and so on. And then, as the poem goes, when they came for me there was nobody to help me.

So, in America, and in New York City in particular, the homeless! People that fell between the cracks... I mean, who cares if their civil liberties are transgressed upon? Who cares if we put this draconian measure before the City Council? As long as it's directed at these particular people.

"As long as you take this draconian law, and you only do it to homeless New Yorkers, and I don't see the impact and I don't have to deal with the impact, and you keep them from blocking up my sidewalk, and when I come from work I don't have to see them homeless, dirty people. I don't have to smell them. As long as you do that, I don't care how you do it! Take away all their civil liberties. I don't care! As long as it's them and not me."

But, I guess these people spend too much time going to and from work, to read World history and American history, because no elite group, no power mongering dictator stops with one group. It always starts with the group that's least popular. He always uses sensationalism and propaganda and the media to demonize these people first.

Demonization comes before criminalization. But after demonization and criminalization, comes institutionalization. And then the institution is enlarged and enlarged, and you look around, and you go to your church, "What happened to brother so-and-so?" "Oh, he became a person of interest because he didn't agree with that. They got him on lock down."



## **2004: CENTRAL PARK CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE**

### **Protesting Selective Enforcement of Park Curfews**

**Sam J. Miller:** In 2004, in November, when we did the civil disobedience in Central Park, and when you and Jean and John were like, "We're going to do this. Do you want to do this?" And, feeling like even though I was scared to put myself in an arrestable position I had thought about it a lot.

Like, in my work with Jews Against the Occupation there was an occasional civil disobedience that I had never participated in a directly arrestable way, because I was really scared. But because I had love for you guys, and I had love for John who was dealing with this stuff, of being arrested in the park all the time, I was like, "Yeah sure, why not?"

**Rogers:** There were times when I had no place to sleep. The subway and Marcus Garvey Park were consistent places that I knew I could find a place to sleep. The bell tower was fenced in, and it was not public access, but it was a place to sleep at night that you probably would not be disturbed. So, the bell tower at Marcus Garvey Park, the top of the park, that was a place where, there were some of us who were regulars, and we'd sleep there. Sometimes we'd be forced to sleep on the street level but you're more likely to get a ticket or to get roused by the police if you're sleeping on the benches on street level.

The park was large enough and the times that I slept in the park, the drug dealers, and the hookers, it seemed, were predominant. I didn't see either of them being a threat to me. So, I wasn't worried about my safety. I was worried about being roused by the police because the police would think either I'm a drug dealer, or I'm selling myself as one of the sex workers. The police would come through, and everybody who was in the park, sometimes they would lock us up.

There was a curfew posted in some places, which is another thing. The city did not do a good job of dealing with the curfew, because the curfew was not posted everywhere. Sometimes that allowed us to beat the tickets. If you entered from 120<sup>th</sup> Street, there was no sign, for instance. For months and months, there was no sign there that says you had to leave the park between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. Or dusk to dawn, whatever the expression was. But if you entered that place, you could legitimately tell the judge, "Your honor, you can go right now. I walked in the park in that entrance, and there's no sign that says what the curfew hours are."

Then there are other times when the entrance on Madison had different posted curfew hours than the entrance on Marcus Garvey Park West, Morris Park West. Because the sign still said Morris Park. The signs were not always in agreement and were



not always posted. So, I would get the tickets, and I ended up sometimes spending the night in jail. It was a warm place to stay so that certainly met my needs. Then the charges would be dismissed the following day depending upon who did the arrest, whether the person who was arresting you was part of the precinct, were they part of special detail. I've been through both, at the precinct as well as Central Booking.

**Lewis:** What would you be charged with?

**Rogers:** Violating the trespass, the curfew laws, the trespassing. If they can get you for anything else, I know not having had proper identification, they wrote that up one time on me, not carrying proper identification, but the judge threw out the charges.

Several times I was ticketed for sleeping in the park. More than that, I guess I was just chased out of the park sometimes, but several times I was ticketed for sleeping in the park. As I said, the bell tower was usually a safe place because most of the police did not want to climb the steps and the police cars could not drive up to the bell tower.

**Lewis:** When you were chased out of the park, where would you go?

**Rogers:** The subways, that would be a place to go, sometimes just walk around. You know where the coffee shops are that are open and you buy a soda, and then you sit and sip that soda for the next three hours. There may be other parks that weren't policed as thoroughly. There are other parks. Marcus Garvey Park was large, and there were enough quiet spaces that you could be invisible. That's one of the reasons that park was popular. And as I said, the bell tower was a place that the police didn't bother to go up. Too much work for them to do that. So that's one place. But there were other parks and other niches, vacant lots. There was a coterie of us that knew where

to go depending upon what was happening. If there's two of us in the park, we'd just take turns sleeping, so one of us would have an eye out for the police. So, I would sleep for two hours and then I'll wake up, and I'll watch for two hours. And then you take a nap. That's something that a couple of us were able to do, so that we'd at least be able to alert each other when the police were coming and we'd disappear into the bushes, or we'd leave the park, or whatever.



**Sam J. Miller:** The city's public housing authority has more restrictive guidelines than the federal guidelines, in terms of who they keep off the list. So that, if you have—in some cases just a violation, not even a misdemeanor criminal encounter, you can be kept off the waiting list for public housing.



**Sam J. Miller:** There's always, at any given moment, a ton of mostly men, but not exclusively, who are homeless and waiting on the bus to go to the several shelters that are on Wards Island. There's also several methadone clinics in the area. It's just sort of this very stark, horrific example of the ways that folks are forced into vulnerable situations, where they're also really heavily policed. There was a heavy, heavy police presence there. There still is. The subway station is just downstairs from there, and there are always *tons of cops there*. More than any other station I know of. More than Times Square, which is supposedly this terrorist target hot spot. But the underground economy at 125<sup>th</sup> is more of a threat to public safety, evidently.

# 2004: OPERATION CARDBOARD BOX

## Mutual Aid, RNC Safe Havens, Access to Mail

MANAGER, CUSTOMER SERVICES  
NEW YORK DISTRICT



August 24, 2004

Ms. Lynn Lewis  
Co. Director/Civil Rights Organizer  
Picture the Homeless  
170 East 116<sup>th</sup> Street #1W  
New York NY 10029

Dear Ms. Lewis:

Please be reassured that it is our goal to ensure that all of our customers receive delivery service within the parameters outlined by those agencies responsible for the Republican National Convention.

As you know, this event will require that some changes be made to our normal service routines. However, in our discussions with those responsible for security, it has been determined that General Delivery will be minimally impacted by the convention's activities. We will continue to open the General Delivery Office for service to customers from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM. The EXCEPTION to this will be on Wednesday, September 1, 2004. On that day, we will extend the hours of operation from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM to afford our customers access to the monthly government checks they depend on. These checks will continue to be available at General Delivery located at 390 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue without interruption.

I hope this has clarified any concerns you may have had and can be of use when responding to your constituents.



David R. Pryor

(212) 209 2864

JAMES A. FARLEY BUILDING  
421 EIGHTH AVENUE - ROOM 3536A  
NEW YORK, NY 10199-9600  
TEL: (212) 330-2902  
Fax: (212) 330-2006



# Are you searching for a **SAFE HAVEN** to sleep during the **REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION?**



For homeless New Yorkers it has never been easy to find a good night's sleep. To make it all worse, the Republican National Convention comes to Midtown Manhattan with frozen zones, massive police presence, terrorist warnings, secret service agents and other craziness.

*Homeless people concerned with their own safety have organized safe havens for a good night's sleep from August 28<sup>th</sup> through September 2<sup>nd</sup>!*

## **Everyone is invited to join!**

*If you are interested, meet us on August 28<sup>th</sup> at 6pm at in the Park in front of the Health Clinic on 9<sup>th</sup> Ave. at 28<sup>th</sup> St.*

*(across from Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen) come, first served. If you have questions feel free to call at Picture The Homeless at 212 427 2499 (ask for Markus)*



**PTH Civil Rights Committee  
Mutual Aid Flyer**

**James Tracy:** It was very tense because you knew that the police and the dozens of other security organizations, their presence was all around New York. It was as close to a lockdown as you could possibly get. Maybe, a lockdown is an exaggeration, but you couldn't walk down the street without especially the closer you got to the RNC place, being reminded about what was constant potential violence from the police.

For that reason, we very rarely ever travelled alone, even if it was just to go enjoy a beer. After one of the events, people always stuck together closely. I remember going to a rally on the courthouse because, of course, as police often do, one of their first steps to preparing for the RNC was just to clear homeless people off the streets and off the subways and y'all called a rally out in front of there. So, you swept us up into action, pretty much right off the plane.



*Jean Rice, PTH civil rights leader, Still We Rise March. August 30, 2004*

**Rev. Liz Maxwell:** Because of the Republican [National] Convention in 2004, we had already begun to think about how we were going to cope with continuing our service and getting people in and out of our space. It was called the frozen zone, because we were so close to where the convention would be, and so we needed to have ID cards for all the people who worked there. But also, we needed to figure out how our guests were going to come and go. I think Picture the Homeless reached out to us because we were involved with doing that, and there had been a lot of people, faith leaders and advocates and others, who had been trying to figure out how to make this work, in that part of the city. I remember very much the conversation about how people could get their mail. Although I don't remember how we resolved it, but we did resolve it so people could get their mail.

**Lewis:** The RNC was the beginning of the month, like the first four days, and 390 Ninth Avenue was on the other side of Madison Square Garden, and 390 Ninth Avenue was general delivery post office. They allowed us to set up across the street and hold people's bags. First they were just going to close it down.

**Maxwell:** Yeah. And people were getting their checks. That was partly why it was so important, because it was the beginning of the month.

**Lewis:** So we went to you, and you were very welcoming and wanted to know what you could do for us. And we told you we just wanted to be part of planning a response, and so you said okay, and you convened a meeting. You called the meeting.

**Maxwell:** That sounds right. That sounds like something I would have done.

**Lewis:** You welcomed everyone, and then you said, "Well you know, I called this with Picture the Homeless, and they have

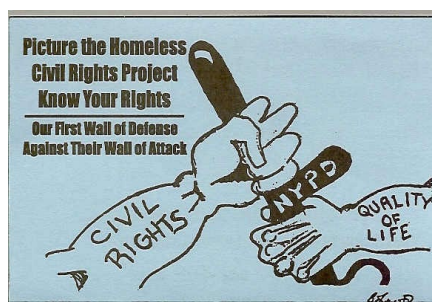
some things they would like to say to you.” And you kind of stepped back.

**Maxwell:** I thought that it was really important that people know what actual homeless people’s perspective was and that it not be just organized by other people who might or might not know what was important, for you. And I wanted you to be actively involved, and there wasn’t really any other way to do that except to have you be actively involved, and to have you be actively involved from the beginning in a kind of a front and center way.

**Lewis:** And so, through that process we set up a network of faith communities that were willing to allow homeless folks to sleep there, that didn’t have church shelter beds, but during that period, didn’t mind. And we were able to force the RNC to reduce the frozen zone. It was kind of like half of Manhattan at first and to keep the post office open.



## 2005: HOLY APOSTLES AND KNOW YOUR RIGHTS TABLING



**Rev. Liz Maxwell:** I thought that Picture the Homeless was doing really important work organizing people and offering a kind of dignity and that not everybody would want to be involved but that for some people they might want to really be involved in

the kind of justice work that you all were doing. And so, I was very happy for there to be a table. Sometimes we had a voter registration table. There were some addiction recovery groups

that had tables. We tried to make sure that they were genuine programs, or people who really could help. We had harm reduction stuff around HIV [human immunodeficiency virus]. I'm sure there were more. Those are the ones that come to me now. But I felt like it was important for people to know what you were doing, and that was the only way I knew to make it available. You could tell your own story. I didn't need to tell it, nor could I have told it.



**Kazembe Balagun:** It's so popular to talk about intersectionality these days, but PTH was the first organization that was really intersectional. They were like, "We're talking about homelessness *and* we're talking about civil rights and we're talking about the rights of people as citizens, and that was very powerful!

I think it was the first organization that I had seen that had a *civil rights division*. I was like, "Ooh! That's unusual. That's unusual to have that." But it was something that would lead the basis for us to talk about citizenship. Particularly now, because I feel like there's two talks around citizenship. There's the external conversation about citizenship that's happening around immigration, and there's the internal stuff about citizenship around economic rights in this country, and who has the rights to survive. Not everyone who's born in America is a citizen, because we don't have everything to survive.

In all those aspects of the work PTH had really became this pedagogical space, and then you guys did it out in the public, and you shared information, and you shared it across boundaries! Movement's not just around a left-right position. It's about embodying a spirit in different places and then challenging and transforming—by your presence—those institutions, and I feel like that's what PTH did.





**Jean Rice:** I guess being homeless gave me the opportunity to see how the criminal justice system is subverted. I mean, being an Afro American, I had an idea about the subversion of the criminal justice system. The idea came from so many male, Afro Americans—capital punishment, lynching—*without due process of law*.



**Jean Rice:** So, at the Precinct level, the police have discretion. They can give you a desk warrant, which just is a “promise to appear.” I know in Harlem, a lot of people that own the brownstones, if they go to Saint Nicolas park and drink a little bit too much, they get taken to the Precinct. Once they verify that they own that brownstone around the corner, they get the desk ticket and they go home, and they're told, “Next time don't drink so much in the park.”

But if you're homeless, then you don't get that desk ticket. And if you have a cart with all your belongings in it, they're not going to take all of that into the Precinct. So, they leave your cart on the street—for whoever. And then, they take you to the precinct and fingerprint you, although, if it's less than a crime you don't have to be fingerprinted, but most people don't know that.

Then you are classified, and if you have no outstanding serious crimes, like armed robbery or rape or something like that, they expedite you, but usually, that takes a minimum of twenty-four hours. So, when they say, “putting you through the system”, you can rest assured that you are going to be absent from the society at large for a minimum of twenty-four hours.



**Joo-Hyun Kang:** The issue of folks getting arrested for shit that are “not crimes” by the criminal legal system, was an issue that most people hadn’t really thought about before.



**Jean Rice:** One of the main impediments that Picture the Homeless had when we tried to secure public space for our unhoused sisters and brothers who were New York City citizens, was this broken windows policing concept. I mean, even well-intentioned so-called liberal allies, they seem to think that broken windows operated in the common good, and it was *okay*.



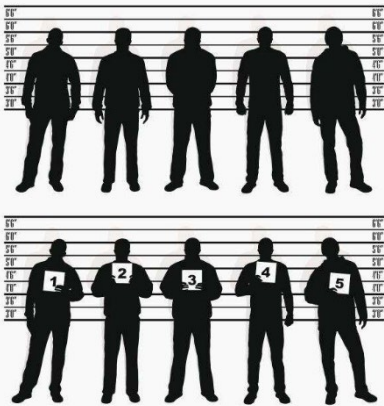
# DAILY NEWS

## **NYPD uses homeless men from Brooklyn shelter as ‘fillers’ for lineups and pays them for participating**

City police often go to the men’s shelter in Crown Heights, Brooklyn for ‘fillers’ for crime lineups. An NYPD spokesperson told The Daily News that shelters provide police with a selective pool of willing applicants.

By [John Surico](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Sunday, March 16, 2014, 2:30 AM



**Rob Robinson:** Two things had happened at The Open Door. One was the coming in at two o'clock in the morning looking for people that may have had a warrant, but also coming in and sort of—I used to say, *playing* homeless people by offering them ten dollars to stand in a line-up. And I'm like, "Yo... "There was a time when I wanted to say,

"Take the ten dollars and stick it you know where." And folks used to like—folks would push back on me and say, "I need the ten dollars, G..." I don't know, it drove me. I stayed in that Open Door about two months before I had a dime in my pocket, and I just wasn't giving in to certain things like that. Like, you're not going to use me like that.

**Marcus Moore:** I saw on that flyer, it said, “fight for housing” and it had “Civil Rights meetings...” I knew with my spirit—I knew I had to check this out! So, when I got there, it was like a big adventure. It was this house and it had this big sign on it. You couldn't miss it. It said Picture the Homeless.

I can remember going up these steps and looking around seeing all these computers, seeing some people and I was like, “I'm here for this meeting today.” They had coffee, free coffee! Yeah. Free coffee. So, I had some coffee and I sat down, I'm looking at what's going on and I was really wondering what happens next—because I saw on the flyer, that this meeting will start at two o'clock, this civil rights meeting.

So, two o'clock came and I got a chance to sit in on this meeting. And the meeting, I'll never forget it. I'll never forget it.



*Jean Rice, Jerry, Pete, GKM, PTH Civil Rights campaign meeting.  
July 14, 2010*

This meeting was a bunch of homeless and formerly homeless people. A lot of them had pens, pads... They was taking notes! And these people, when they talk—I was like where did they learn all this from!? I saw white men. I saw Black men. I saw all types of racial groups in that room. Men, women... And right away I took to it and I just, you know—it just made me want to fall back and take notes internally.

I got a chance to learn how to lobby in Albany. I got a chance to learn some things about the organization, when it was founded, who our founders are, you know... And I got a chance *to talk in public* about some of the work that we're doing at Picture the Homeless and kind of like help people to understand that the stereotypes when it comes to challenging homeless people... That it's really just a stereotype, it's not really what's going on.

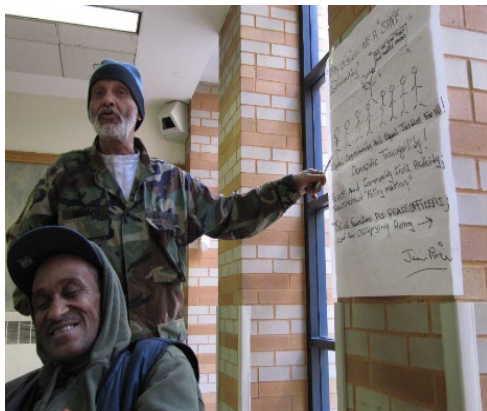


**Maria Walles:** I would say like 2012 when Shaun was there, I got into civil rights heavy. He's the one that encouraged me. I think it's the way he brought things to the table and the way he made civil rights the meeting to go to. And I mean, even if I couldn't make it, I'll be like, "Yo, I'm here. I'm sorry I couldn't make it. I'm here." And besides Shaun, I think once y'all started the Homeless Organizing Academy and having those weekly classes made me want to come even more and more and more and get involved, you know?



**Shaun Lin:** Marcus [Moore] and Maria [Walles] both took on roles of being trained to do Know Your Rights stuff. So, they would be very regular at Holy Apostles and other places that we would do outreach and do Know Your Rights trainings with folks. Marcus would also tell me that he would just be with his friends at different spaces, and he'd be having those conversations with folks. This is outside of the Picture the Homeless space, so he really embodied that work.

Jean, I kind of see as like our North Star in terms of a political analysis, but also like our historian. He would always make sure that folks remembered, “We have to read the mission during our meetings, and we really have to always be sure that we are acting in accordance to the mission of Picture the Homeless.”



*Jean Rice, Bernard, Civil Rights retreat. 2009*

## 2007: DISORDERLY CONDUCT CAMPAIGN

# DAILY NEWS

**Tuesday, June 15th, 2010**

We're not criminals, homeless New Yorkers tell cops in protest outside NYPD Headquarters



*PTH Civil Rights Campaign Street Theatre, citizen's arrest of NYPD Commissioner. June 2010*

# THE INDYPENDENT



Homeless & Racial Justice Activists Hold Summit on the NYPD's Use of "Disorderly Conduct" Statute, by Tej Nagaraja, January 22, 2010

On Thursday night at the offices of the Center for Constitutional Rights, homeless members of the citywide grassroots organization Picture the Homeless (PTH) convened a summit with leaders from other civil and human rights organizations to discuss the NYPD's use of the Disorderly Conduct statute, which they charge is unconstitutional in its vagueness and arbitrary enforcement. Community members testified about being ticketed or arrested, with their alleged violation never specified. The organizations present identified such policing within an unjust pattern of profiling based on perceived homeless status, race, and other discriminatory factors.



**Shaun Lin:** Picture the Homeless members do a really great job of historicizing what's happening. So, it's not just, "We don't want police to be over policing the subway at night, but that this is part of a larger issue related to Broken Windows policing, related to the criminalization of poverty and homelessness, in ways that I think really resonated with folks.

## 2010: CHALLENGING SELECTIVE ENFORCEMENT at Grand Central and Penn Station

**Jean Rice:** Sometimes, my organization and I have *openly* confronted the policy [of Broken Windows]. For instance, there was a time at Grand Central, when—if you were tired and you sat down and you fell asleep, you were either thrown out, asked for ID, and put through the system... While right next to you, some guy or girl, who had just put in ten hours at the office and waiting for a train to go back to upstate New York or Connecticut, would fall asleep and a cop would stand there and protect them. And matter of fact, tap them gently and say, “Madam or sir, you don't want to miss your train.”

Whereas, with the homeless person, who appeared to be homeless, he was awakened by a nightstick—banging so close to him, it's almost deafening to his ear, or a dog from the canine corps growling at him in a threatening manner.

So, Picture the Homeless went, on two occasions, with enough bodies—we'd just occupy all the seats. And we had some members that were dressed like the profile of a homeless person, but we had other people deployed up on the balcony level with our banner.



*Penn Station Sit-In March 17, 2010, and Grand Central Station Banner Drop. 2010*





## 2011: COMMUNITIES UNITED FOR POLICE REFORM (CPR)

**Lynn Lewis:** One of the things that I learned from you [Joo-Hyun Kang] was being very explicit about the difference between a legal strategy and a political strategy, and how they should be complimentary, and one amplify the other. So, when Picture the Homeless was invited to be part of [what would become] CPR in 2011, the visioning session, we'd been *trying* to talk to legal service organizations for years about homeless folks being profiled, but there's no evidence except the vast numbers of homeless people that have the lived experience.

**Joo-Hyun Kang:** That's right, except for the actual evidence.

**Lewis:** We were always told, "Well, you know, that's terrible, but there's nothing we can do." from a legal perspective. So for us, what became CPR was the first time that we were part of a coalition that not only was using legal—but political strategy, and that being part of a coalition helped really amplify the position of each member of the coalition.



**Joo-Hyun Kang:** I also remember early, probably in 2012, there was some press thing where I was like, "Do you want to speak?" And you were like, "Oh, I don't speak for Picture the Homeless, but I'll find a member who can, and Sam will prep them, and et cetera, et cetera." And that's a practice that I feel we've tried to help promote amongst groups, but it was always really helpful that you practiced that already, in terms of really uplifting but also just facilitating and making sure that the leadership was coming from people who were most directly impacted in that moment.

**Shaun Lin:** Communities United for Police Reform was a coalition of grassroots nonprofit organizations, who had to some degree worked on policing issues, in their own silos or in their own places around the city. I think that it was the first time that groups had come together on that type of scale to push a citywide agenda on police reform. There was a pretty ambitious policy agenda that the campaign was pushing, around profiling, consent to search, and the Inspector General. And it was pushing for both city and state legislation that addressed police violence in New York City.

Picture the Homeless had internal civil rights organizing work that it had already been doing. A lot of it was around being present at shelters, at soup kitchens, doing Know Your Rights trainings for folks, passing out Know Your Rights information. And I think Picture the Homeless had also began to engage in city-wide Communities United for Police Reform organizing at around the time that I came on to staff. So, part of it was specific Picture the Homeless Civil Rights Committee organizing work and then the other part of it was citywide police reform campaign work. I think my role as a civil rights organizer was to handle those two prongs, to do the outreach and base building work, and then also to kind of handle those two prongs to do the outreach and base building work and also to represent the organization in these coalition spaces.

Picture the Homeless sat as the chair of the policy working group with New York Civil Liberties Union, and that was a lot of work. Picture the Homeless was also part of the community empowerment working group, which was really about on the ground, doing trainings, doing cop watch related actions. And we were a small organization, with a small staff, with not a huge budget, and did a whole bunch of work, I think, much bigger than I think our actual footprint was in the years that I was there doing the police reform stuff.

# 2013: THE COMMUNITY SAFETY ACT

August 22, 2013

## Overriding Bloomberg's Vetoes, New York City Council Bans NYPD Racial Profiling



*Pass the Community Safety Act Rally, PTH Civil Rights campaign, CPR, June 24, 2013*

**Shaun Lin:** I remember the one bill that really resonated with folks was the profiling bill, which initially started as a racial profiling bill if I remember correctly, right? Picture the Homeless fought really hard to have language around profiling of homelessness or perception of homelessness included and if it wasn't for Picture the Homeless' participation in CPR, I don't think that that language would have even been obvious to people, that it was important.

I don't think that we thought that it was going to pass until it actually did, which is why we were there at two o'clock in the morning when the city council finally voted on it. And you know, I think now in 2019, discourse around the ways that police enact racism is much more apparent. I think in 2012 that that wasn't necessarily clear to people. And so, I don't think that there was much political will, prior to our organizing to make things like this happen.



**Joo-Hyun Kang:** Another memory, is when the Community Safety Act got passed. And what was it, like two o'clock in the morning or some shit?

And Picture the Homeless members who were there, who were clear, they're like, "We did this." Which I was so thankful for because I feel like *that was true*, and it's too often when legislative victories happen that grassroots organizations or directly impacted people don't own that victory.



*Ryan Gibbs, PTH Civil Rights Campaign, witnessing the passage of the Community Safety Act. 2013.*

Picture the Homeless had not only fought for, but really led that fight, so I feel like the way in which Picture the Homeless trains members, develops leadership, ensures the members are always out front, is something that a lot of organizations can learn from.



**Shaun Lin:** I remember, very meticulously having spreadsheets of who the city council members were, which ones we thought were solidly going to support our work, which ones we knew were solidly against our work, and then the ones in the middle having to do a lot of meetings with them, or if not meeting with them, outreach in their districts to give them political coverage for their support. I remember having to make sure there was homeless members speaking at each of these actions that Communities United for Police Reform was planning, because we wanted to make sure that the work that homeless members of Picture the Homeless had put into the organizing work was not made invisible.



**Shaun Lin:** They [civil rights meetings] were generally attended by, between ten and twenty-five members, every Tuesday afternoon. So related to Communities United for Police Reform, it would be updates on what was happening with the campaign work and seeking input from members in terms of particular next steps that they thought were important, in terms of how to support the campaign.

Then there was other things that happened too, in civil rights like, while we were doing the CPR work, there was actions taken by the NYPD that particularly like targeted homeless folks, or particularly targeted shelters, or targeted people sleeping on the train that were not related to the broader citywide work, but that we also needed to prioritize, and it was oftentimes planning direct actions to address those things too.

There would be particular skills that we would need to work on in order to best engage with the CPR work. Some of it was things like public speaking. So, if we were to have an action coming up and want to encourage newer members to speak at the press conference so we're not always relying on the same members talking, the Homeless Organizing Academy might organize a series of public speaking trainings. And public speaking is—part of it is public speaking, but the first part of it is even just like, “How do I take my story and write it out in a way that communicates the end message that I want?”

So, public speaking is also thinking about our stories, how do our stories connect to the issue that we're working on, and then how do I practice doing this in a way—because public speaking is very scary to people. So, how do I practice in a way where I can show up powerfully, on the day of? So, Homeless Organizing Academy—I know that there was a regular writing class, right? There was stuff around public speaking. I know that there was regular computer classes. Computer literacy was really important for folks. So, it would kind of just provide tools and analysis for folks to be able to engage with the campaign work powerfully.



**Shaun Lin:** I really loved the mural that we painted in Harlem. I loved that because it was such a learning process for all of us. That started with members of Picture the Homeless just kind of studying together. We had begun to read *The New Jim Crow* with each other and begun to talk about the issues that PTH members were organizing around, around policing and civil rights in the context of what Michelle Alexander was writing about in *The New Jim Crow*.

Those conversations eventually led to a lot of visioning for what a mural could look like in Central Harlem. I think what I really appreciated about that was just the process, and the dialogue and us all very seriously taking our own political education to envision this mural happening. So, it wasn't so much even how much fun it was to paint the mural. It was fun to paint the mural, but I think what I most fondly remember is the study sessions, the visioning sessions, just the input that Picture the Homeless members had in shaping what we ultimately painted on that wall.



Sophia [Dawson] was the lead artist of the Know Your Rights mural, and is an amazingly talented artist. I had known Sophia through her portraits of political prisoners.

I think that what I really appreciated with working with her was that she didn't come in with a particular project already set. She was really there to listen to members of Picture the Homeless and members of People's Justice, kind of working

together. Sophia didn't come in with, "I'm going to paint this mural, here's how y'all can help me paint the mural." I think she was really committed to, "I'm interested in working through this community education process *with you*, sitting through reading with you, talking about what images come up, what we want to say about policing, what we want to say about homelessness, what we think is important for people passing by this wall to take in." And just really working through slowly what the process of this mural could look like at the end.

I think that it's never one person who has an idea of what the thing will look like and that's what everybody agrees on, right? There was definitely a lot of back-and-forth negotiations in terms of folks wanted to have this type of imagery in there, or this type of messaging in there. Picture the Homeless members came with a lot of ideas, a lot of images, but were also really committed to it being a collective process, meaning that they didn't insist on what they said being in there, being the final product. That they were willing to negotiate and compromise. It was really a community building process.



**Shaun Lin:** October 22<sup>nd</sup> is the National Day of Protests against Police Brutality. It's been going on for at least twenty years now and I think Picture the Homeless members took on a lot of leadership in organizing that stuff. Marcus, Kendall, and Jean, I think in particular would be regulars at those meetings. It was really important to them to support the family members of people who were killed by police. So yeah, in my time at Picture the Homeless, we would open up the office space for meetings if possible, to plan for the actions, but folks would also take on a lot of the work in coordinating the actual day's actions.



One of the things I remember was that before I had started, the action was often at Union Square, and it would march down towards City Hall or One Police Plaza. Picture the Homeless members really wanted for these actions to happen in the hood. They wanted it to happen in Harlem, or in the Bronx or somewhere where folks were at, and that it just felt more grounded in the communities that it's supposed to be raising the consciousness for.

I think one of the years I was at Picture the Homeless, the October 22<sup>nd</sup> stuff was spread out around the city, including actions on 161<sup>st</sup> Street in the Bronx, and having speak outs in the park on 161<sup>st</sup> and then marching down towards The Hub on 3<sup>rd</sup> on 149<sup>th</sup>, where folks are getting off the trains when they're coming home from work, and just really trying to be present, that this protest isn't just a symbolic protest that's happening somewhere downtown, but that it's a protest that helps to bring consciousness about what's happening into the neighborhoods where it's most impacted.

That was really the reason why October 22<sup>nd</sup> was in the Bronx that year was because PTH members pushed for that to happen. So, part of it was Picture the Homeless just opening up office space for people to meet, but part of it was also Picture the Homeless members—as always—bringing in their analysis into a space and leaving a real impact on that space, and on that organizing.

## **2014: REVERSING A PLAN TO KICK HOMELESS FOLKS OFF THE E TRAIN**

**Shaun Lin:** There was a moment in which the NYPD had, this was during when it was really cold in the wintertime, which is the time when there's most often homeless folks who sleep on the train. The NYPD began to announce that they were going

to run sweeps to either arrest or, at least take people off the train. It seemed like they were going to be arresting them or forcing them into shelters.

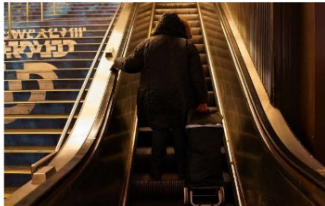


*GKM, PTH Civil Rights Rally at One Police Plaza protesting plan to remove homeless folks from E train. 2014.*

## MTA & NYPD: HANDS OFF HOMELESS PEOPLE!

### **MTA PASSENGERS:**

- The NYPD & MTA will start clearing homeless folks from the E train to encourage them to go into shelters or hospitals even after they have paid the fare.
- But it is **NOT** illegal to sleep or ride on the trains while homeless!!
- The NYPD and MTA say this is part of an 'outreach' plan to solve homelessness, but **more policing is not the solution – HOUSING IS!**



### **What Are The Facts?**

- The MTA & NYPD planned to temporarily clear homeless folks from the E train on February 24<sup>th</sup> at 3AM and encourage them to go to shelters or hospitals. The plan has been postponed due to opposition.
- There has been an **increase in homeless people** sleeping on the subways **due to a lack of affordable housing** and the cold.
- In 2013, City Council passed a bill that prohibited profiling based on housing status.
- Anyone the MTA & NYPD profiles to be homeless will be asked to leave – even if they have paid the fare.

We at Picture the Homeless are concerned that the NYPD – who regularly profile and criminalize homeless people – are involved in a plan with the MTA to “solve homelessness”. Although the MTA & NYPD postponed the program, Picture the Homeless and its allies will be riding on the E train and stationed at each end of the line starting at 2:30 AM on February 24<sup>th</sup> to make sure homeless people are safe, their rights are not being violated, and they are being treated respectfully.

So, we organized a bunch of Cop Watch at the end of train lines that we thought would be over policed, and then also passing out information about what people's legal rights are on the trains.

And then we did a bunch of media stuff too that publicly brought attention to the fact that the police were doing this. They ended up calling it off and they ended up not arresting people off the train.

2427 Morris Ave,  
Bronx NY 10468

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**Joo-Hyun Kang:** I remember in 2014, the MTA [Metropolitan Transportation Authority] declared that they were going to sweep homeless people of the A, C, E trains, and Picture the Homeless really led a fight at that point to make sure that didn't happen. And I think one of the things that I learned during that fight, probably from members and Sam [J. Miller], was really you all did political education, for the rest of us. It was easy to get groups to support that fight and to try to get Cop Watchers and other people to show up that night when we went to the train, when they said they were going to sweep everybody off, and stay there.

I think some of it was a good learning for me around how to publicly frame the issues around it. Sam was really patient and helpful about being clear with us and our comms team at the time that people who are homeless don't want to be on the fucking trains all night either! And to reframe what this was, and that they had paid their fare, so why shouldn't they be able to be on the fucking trains? So, I feel like it was a different way to think about the issues, but also to really respect the agency of people and not just think about it as an issue.



**Shaun Lin:** There was an instance where a homeless person was held at Rikers in an inhumanely hot cell and died. Picture the Homeless members wanted to do some action that brought attention to the fact that this happened to a homeless person, on Rikers Island. We made a coffin out of foam board and brought it down to One Police Plaza and really talked about the criminalization of homelessness—and that being what led to this this man's death. The homeless man's name was Jerome Murdough, so that was one thing.

## 2014: FREEDOM HOUSE

### Warrant Squads and Shelter Raids

**Shaun Lin:** The cops had done raids in these homeless shelters in the Upper West Side, where they were going in and checking the names of people who were staying in the shelter against their own list of people who had open warrants, which was making it very unsafe, because then people began to fear whether or not they could go into a shelter or whether or not the shelter would just turn their information over to the police. We ran a couple of actions around that, that I think stopped the police from entering those shelters and continuing to do that.



**Nikita Price:** When I came back, Picture the Homeless was right in the middle of the... What's the name of that fucking—Freedom House. So, you're dealing now with shelter. You're dealing with, fucking—the community, and you're dealing with fucking police, all three of those things, in upper Broadway. Now these white people were like, “Eh! Eh! Eh!” And police were doing shelter raids. So, the community, the police and the shelter staff were shitting on people.

I remember there being a big rally outside of Freedom House, and then I remember us going over to the library. Now, I wasn't on staff then. I was the wellness organizer, but then it's just like, “Oh, you're right back in it.” Because I'm listening to the people fucking vamp across the street, the homeowners. Then I'm listening to folks that Ryan had gathered and prepped to talk to the press, and then we had to go over to

the fucking library and I'm listening to the NYPD and shelter folks shit on us.

The homeowners were pulling that NIMBY shit and this fucking city didn't have a process whereby of getting people out of this fucking plight, into some type of real housing. And that's when I also realized that the shelter complex was a business, you know? There wasn't a viable shelter voucher then. People were just languishing then, and still having to be demonized by these people.

You walk out the door, the people across the street are demonizing you. You get to the corner, the fucking police are stopping their car, asking you for ID, and then you still had to go bow to all of these other agencies. That got me just a little bit more intrigued and then it just so happened that Shaun, who was the civil rights organizer, was in the process of leaving. I didn't know about it until somebody approached me.



## **2014: KICKING OFF 11 DAYS OF RAGE**

As members of Communities United for Police Reform, PTH civil rights committee kicked off 11 days of rage, (one day for each time Eric Garner said, "I Can't Breathe" holding a Die-In in the Bronx with the Justice Committee, an occupation of the Manhattan Institutes offices, and march and die-in at Penn Station.



*Nikita Price, Arvernetta Henry, PTH Civil Rights committee prepares for Days of Rage. December 2014.*



*PTH Civil Rights Campaign and the Justice Committee Die-In and March. December, 2014.*



*Marcus  
Moore,  
PTH Civil  
Rights  
Campaign,  
Penn  
Station  
Die-In*

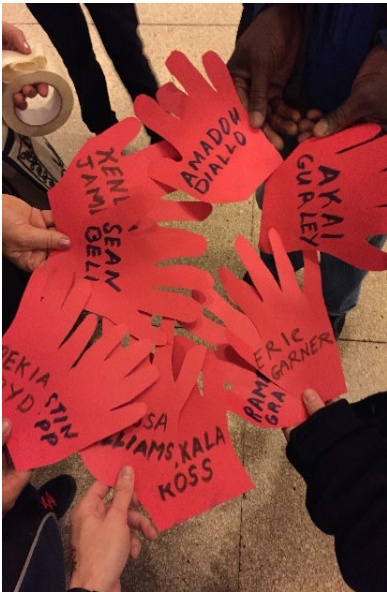
## **Medical Students, Activists Stage Nationwide "Die-Ins" over Eric Garner Decision**

Protests continue nationwide one week after a grand jury chose not to indict a New York City police officer for the chokehold death of [Eric Garner](#). On Wednesday, students at around 70 medical schools nationwide staged joint "die-ins," donning white lab coats and laying their bodies on the ground. In New York City, the group Picture the Homeless staged a rally at the right-wing Manhattan Institute before a march to Penn Station, where they held a "die-in" for 11 minutes — that's 11 for the amount of times Garner repeated his last words, "I can't breathe." Protesters called for the repeal of the NYPD policy known as "broken windows." Marcus Moore: "It basically focuses on issues that's not really a crime, where you could just get a small ticket and you don't have to be taken down in handcuffs to central booking. It's ridiculous."



## 2014: DAYS OF RAGE Manhattan Institute Takeover

Arvernetta Henry, PTH Civil Rights Campaign, making signs of bloody hands with the names of people killed by the NYPD to be taped onto the walls of the offices of the Manhattan Institute.



## 2015: Metro North Sleepout

Reclaiming public space echoes throughout PTH's civil rights work.



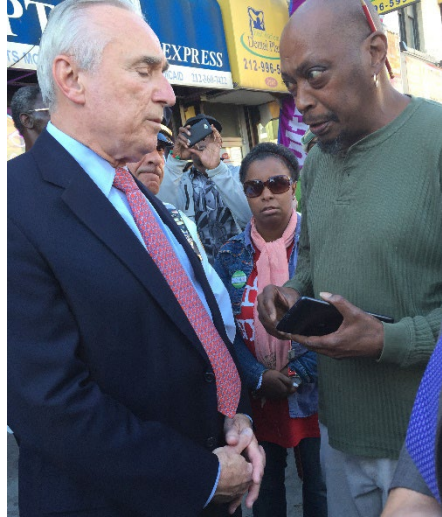
*Marcus Moore interviewing Nikita Price, PTH civil rights organizer. July 2015*



## 2015: PTH CONFRONTS NYPD

### Commissioner Bratton

After months of ordering police officers to brutalize and harass homeless people on 125<sup>th</sup> Street, NYPD Commissioner made a surprise inspection of the plaza across from the Metro North station. Dozens of members of Picture the Homeless confronted him, demanding a meeting and explaining how his actions violate the civil rights of people without homes, including the Community Safety Act.



*Nikita Price, Maria Waller and PTH members and staff confront NYPD Commissioner Bratton. November 3, 2015*

## 2015: DARE TO IMAGINE

Reclaiming Space on East 125<sup>th</sup> Street meant not only filing lawsuits, passing legislation, Copwatch and Know Your Rights education. PTH continued the tactic of putting our bodies on the line by taking the action directly to the physical spaces where folks' rights are being violated.

This meant sleep-outs, rallies, and cultural events in the space across from the Metro North where PTH civil rights campaign members were displaced, routinely harassed and their belongings thrown away.

With Betty Yu, Picture the Homeless hosted a cultural intervention where participants were invited to envision a future with housing for all.

**Betty Yu:** #Dare to Imagine, that theme of radical imagination and daring to dream what sort of a utopian future would look like where homelessness does not exist, and we have the abundance of housing and things. We often know what we're fighting against, and of course, folks who are doing the day to day organizing, that's what you're up against. But then using that as a way to think about, in a revolutionary way, what are we actually ultimately fighting for? What's the end goal? What's that future look like?



*PTH reclaiming space at the MetroNorth Plaza. 2015*

I think Picture the Homeless, and a number of other groups have been articulating and envisioning that, and that's been part of their mission and work for a long time.

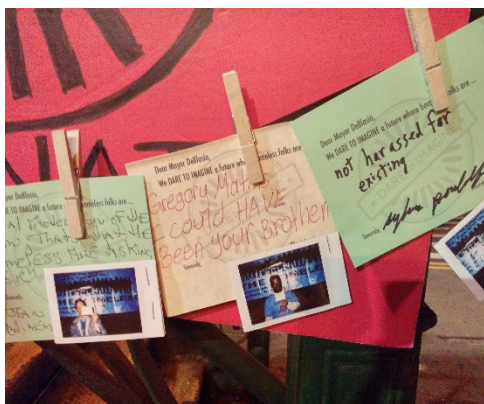
I reached out to you all about doing something, when all that was happening under the 125<sup>th</sup> Street, where folks were criminalized, basically. It was in the news, and you all had been a part of Communities United for Police Reform, but it was very publicized how homeless folks were being literally attacked and criminalized and their belongings were being taken very violently. They were violently ripped from the spot under the Metro-North train.

I think me and you Lynn, were talking a few times about reclaiming that space and using that possibly as an opportunity to collaborate and do a speak out, performance, a cultural event, basically.

It was an amazing event. It was a little chilly. I think you all were giving out hot soup and some other snacks. So it's like, "Yeah! We're the public, we're coming in and we're going to reclaim it!" I think we showed a video, there was a speak-out. There was poetry.



Artists Not4Prophet and Betty Yu at #DaretoImagine



Then the final thing we had was the art making station where we were taking polaroid's of homeless folks, some who were members and leaders and some who had maybe just encountered the event. We had asked them to take a photo of

themselves and if they didn't want a photo I think we took a picture of an object or their bag or their hands or something, but most folks didn't mind. We were sending postcards basically to the mayor, and they had to finish the sentence, "I dare to imagine..." And then—you know, "A time when homelessness... The end to homelessness." Then they would finish the postcard from there, and we actually did send it.

## 2015: NOTICE OF CLAIM

**Floyd Parks:** We was told, “Go up the block! Go up to the school.” We was told to go up in that area because they couldn’t see us. We were out of sight, out of mind, I guess. We was eyesores. They didn’t want to see all these homeless people laying and sleeping out there. They just wanted to move us and get rid of us to another area as soon as possible. So they said, “Go down there to the school”, which was 127<sup>th</sup> Street, and that’s where we started sleeping.

The security lady, that did security for the school, would wake us up like six in the morning and we all would just leave. We would go there, and we’d clean up behind ourselves. I mean, we never left no mess. We always tried to make it good for the next day—we’d come back, we’d have no problems. It was me, Chyna, Doc—wow. They had Triple R. I think Country was there, too. I think Rick was there. I think Nene was there.

We were sleeping there that night, by the school. Everybody had their property, had their areas, laying down, sleeping. All of a sudden the cops come along, flashing flashlights in our faces, kicking us in our feet, telling us we’ve got to get up and move. I said, “Okay.” I’m getting up to move. I take my cart, and they said, “Where are you going with that? No, that’s stolen property. That’s got to stay here. That’s going in the garbage.” I said, “That’s all my belongings!” He said, “Man, if you don’t get off of that and move, we’re going to lock you up.” I said, “That’s my property!” He said, “You’re going to keep it up, we’re going to lock you up. You just walk away.” So, I just walked away! I mean, they just took my stuff and threw it in the garbage can and crushed it up, you know?

Then I was talking to Picture the Homeless about it, and these lawyers—the Civil Liberties Union, Alexis [Karteron]. She got some video cameras of the school and showed exactly what they did to us. That was very beneficial. Seeing is believing.

And they said, “Oh, that’s right there on camera, black-and-white.” So, they couldn’t lie out of that one! So, that was a good experience, to be heard and be seen—that this is what is being done to us out there.

I had to decide—did I want to go along with this, looking over my shoulder, worrying about cops messing with me, or do I continue on to fight this? And I said, “I’ve got to continue on! I’ve got to make this mission known. They just can’t keep doing this stuff, and people just turning their back, letting them do it. If they see it, they don’t say nothing. I mean, it’s got to stop. The way that we’re being treated out there, the way we’re being put in situations, in harm’s way. That’s got to stop.”



I was asking for some kind of “I’m sorry. What we did was wrong.” One of the lawsuits proved that they were wrong. I wish it could have been a lot more, but just the fact that we did win, the fact that it was done to us, and it’s documented, that made it a little better, somewhat—showing what’s happening, what they’re doing. It made me feel good that something is finally accomplished out of this, something good is coming through it.





DATE: 01/19/2016  
TIME: 19:07:42  
SER#: 20601189

## FINEST MESSAGE

### General Administrative Information

TO: ALL COMMANDS

RE: HOMELESS ENCAMPMENT PROCEDURE

EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY, MEMBERS OF THE SERVICE WHO ENCOUNTER ENCAMPMENTS OR HOT-SPOTS OF HOMELESS PERSONS ARE TO NOTIFY THE CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT'S OFFICE FOR INCLUSION IN THE MULTI-AGENCY HOMELESS INITIATIVE TASK FORCE DATABASE. THE NOTIFICATION IS TO BE MADE TO SGT. JOSE CAMBEIRO AT 646-610-8682. ENCAMPMENTS ARE OUTDOOR LOCATIONS WITH A VISIBLE STRUCTURE WHERE TWO OR MORE INDIVIDUALS ARE GATHERED, OFTEN UNDER BRIDGES OR IN REMOTE AREAS WHERE GROUPS CAN ISOLATE. HOT-SPOTS ARE OUTDOOR LOCATIONS WHERE TWO OR MORE INDIVIDUALS ARE GATHERED WITHOUT A STRUCTURE. THIS MAY INCLUDE PARKS OR OTHER POPULAR AREAS WHERE HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS CONVEENE.

UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, ABSENT A POLICE EMERGENCY, NO INDEPENDENT COMMAND, PRECINCT OR BOROUGH BASED CLEAN-UPS, ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS, OR SIMILAR EFFORTS, ARE TO BE UNDERTAKEN AT ENCAMPMENTS OR HOT-SPOTS. ANY SUCH EFFORTS WILL ONLY BE UNDERTAKEN IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE MULTI-AGENCY HOMELESS INITIATIVE TASK FORCE.

WHEN ASSIGNED TO ASSIST THE MULTI-AGENCY HOMELESS INITIATIVE TASK FORCE AT AN ENCAMPMENT OR HOT-SPOT CLEAN-UP, MEMBERS OF THE SERVICE WILL ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES CONCERNING PROPERTY PRESENT AT THE LOCATION. UMOS ARE TO TAKE ALL APPROPRIATE PRECAUTIONS TO PROTECT AGAINST ANY HEALTH HAZARDS. IF A SUPERVISOR IS ON SCENE, THEY ARE TO ENSURE THAT SUCH PRECAUTIONS ARE TAKEN.

INDIVIDUALS WILL BE DIRECTED TO IMMEDIATELY REMOVE ALL THEIR PROPERTY FROM THE LOCATION AND BE GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO. MEMBERS OF THE SERVICE ARE REMINDED THAT IF AN INDIVIDUAL IS UNABLE TO REMOVE ALL OF THEIR ITEMS, THE UMOS WILL INFORM THE PERSON THE POLICE DEPARTMENT WILL SAFEGUARD AND VOUCHER THE ITEMS. ITEMS WILL ONLY BE VOUCHERED IF IT IS A REASONABLY SMALL AMOUNT THAT CAN EASILY BE TRANSPORTED IN ONE RMP. THE HOMELESS OUTREACH UNIT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PHOTOGRAPHING THE ITEMS TO BE VOUCHERED. ASSIGNED PRECINCT PERSONNEL WILL PLACE THE ITEMS IN A PLASTIC BAG AND SEAL THE BAG WITH A PEDDLER'S SEAL ZIP TIE. PRECINCT PERSONNEL WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSPORTING AND VOUCHERING THE PROPERTY AS A SEALED, NON-ITEMIZED, BAG(S). PRECINCT PERSONNEL WILL PROVIDE INDIVIDUALS WHOSE PROPERTY IS TO BE SAFEGUARDED WITH A RECEIPT LISTING THE VOUCHERING OFFICER'S NAME, COMMAND

ADMN - SER#: 20601189

**Floyd Parks:** You've got to make the changes. Ain't nothing going to change unless you make a change. You know what I'm saying? You've got to stand up and be heard for what you want done! If not, it's not going to get done." It gives me a feeling of achieving something, a feeling that something's going to be done, something's going to benefit somebody in the long run. Somebody's going to come out with a smile on their face, achieving and making their life better. And I'm doing something that's going to improve that.



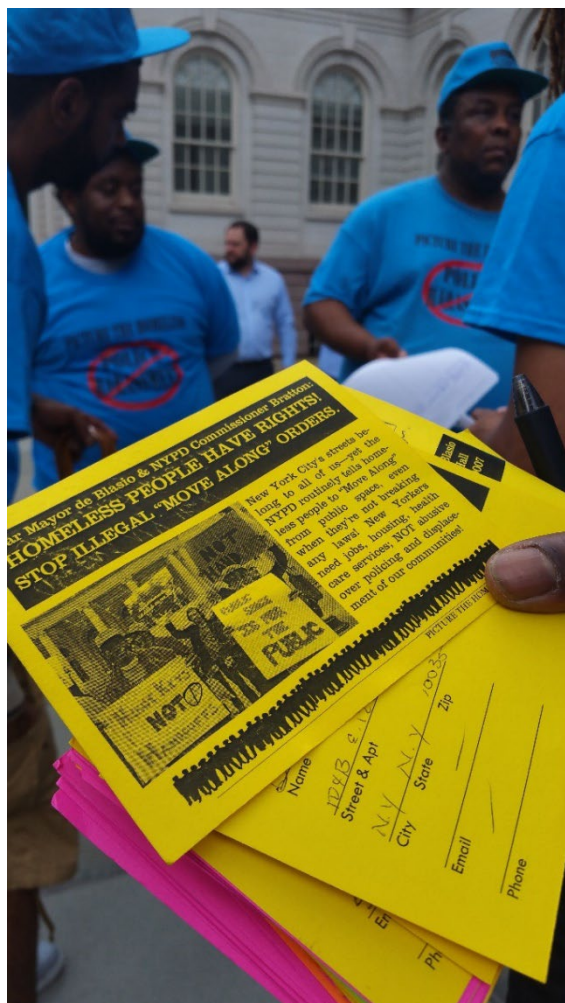
## 2016: MOVE-ON ORDERS

**Floyd Parks:** We congregate together, we're talking, and probably a little drinking and whatever. We were just gathering. And the cops would just come along and say, "Yo, you got to go. You got to break this up. You got to leave." I said, "Where are we going? I mean, we have nowhere to go. Where are we going?" "You've just got to leave here. I don't care. Walk around the corner. Do something. Just get out of here."

Because they're probably getting complaints from the community, "Look at all these people; what are they doing?" So, the cops come, and they tell us there's too much of us, there's too many of us, so we got to scatter out, we got to separate. They harass us. We go over there. They come over there and tell us, "No, you can't stay here. You've got to go over there." We go over there. "Oh, we got complaints, so you've got to, " They're just, like with cattle, just herding us around. It becomes aggravating, becomes frustrating. You relax and all of a sudden, "You got to get up. You got to go."

I said, “Yo, man, I just—” “I don’t care. You’ve got to go. You want to go to jail? Go to hospital? What do you want to do? You’ve got to leave here.” And so, I just get up and go.

But... It’s rough. It’s definitely something I wouldn’t wish on my worst enemy. It’s bad enough being homeless in the streets. Then you get harassed by the cops every day. You can’t sit down. You can’t rest. Oh, you got to move here. You can’t stay there.



It’s a struggle. It’s a mind-baffling. You don’t know which way you’re turning to, don’t know which way you’re going the next day, how you’re going to eat, whatever. It makes you angry, because—wow... Why is society... Why am I in this situation? Why am I... Why am I... *Why?* There’s got to be a better way, you know? The only better way there’s going to be is by letting somebody know how it is, to talk about it.



**James Doctor:** Some of my belongings that I had, the officers threw away because being homeless, we didn't have nowhere to put our stuff. You can't put it in no locker, you know. We're homeless! Half of us didn't even know nothing about how to go about getting food stamps and public assistance and stuff, until we met Picture the Homeless and such people as that.



*PTH Civil Rights Committee Protesting Move-on Orders.  
August 2, 2016*

They would come around, and they'll tell you, "Oh, you can't leave this stuff here." But you have nowhere *to put it*. A lot of people were displaced, lost their home, or whatever, and have nowhere to go and you have no money, you can't put this in storage. What are you supposed to do with this stuff?

Most of the people, you see them all day long, you be like "this person's crazy." No, that's their personal belongings. That's why you see them with a shopping cart, pulling it around the city all day long. Because most of their life is in there. You'd be surprised, you'd look in there, people be having photobooks of their family, children, all kinds of things. I've seen people with picture books and stuff from when they got married and stuff like that, holding onto memories.

And the police just come, "Oh, oh, oh, oh—throw it in the back of the garbage truck." How are people supposed to react? That's like me coming in your house and telling you, "You get out of your house, I live here now." How would you respond?

That's basically what they're doing. "You ain't go nowhere to keep this stuff, so we're going to throw it in the garbage."

They basically don't even want a homeless person on 125<sup>th</sup> and Park Avenue area because they've got all these new construction buildings, and everything going on around there. They're chasing everybody from the Eastside to the Westside. That's what they're really trying to do. They're trying to push everybody from the Eastside to the West, and then from there, I don't know where. There has got to be a better solution than what they're doing now.



**Floyd Parks:** They call us "eyesores." They don't want to see us. They don't want to look at us. They move us over here, move us over there. They don't want us on the main strip, with a lot of people, with tourists, and they don't want to look at us! They want to push us to the side. That's what they're trying to do. When we get up, they take our crates and they put them in the police car. Sometimes, like when we're sitting on the wall over here, they just throw them across the wall. Now we can't get to them. They did that a couple days ago! They just took their crates and threw them over that wall.

**Lewis:** One of the things that stands out for me, in that incident, was the police officers putting on gloves. What do the gloves mean?

**Parks:** The gloves mean that they're too good to touch us. That we're not worthy of being touched without gloves. Yeah, like we've got a disease or something.

**James Doctor:** Especially with the police—like when they were throwing our property and stuff away, they was trying to use the textbook terms to go around and avoid the question—the real problem, “When did y’all okay for y’all to just come out and throw peoples’ stuff away like that?” Like y’all are the garbage company, and we just put our stuff out there to be thrown away?

When, in other words, even though we don’t have no four walls—you broke in our house, and you stole our belongings, and threw it away! Or took it from us. Because we didn’t give you permission to throw it away, we didn’t put it out there ourselves.

So, who gave y’all the right to do this? That was the whole point to the question, who appointed them in control of my property, my life, my belongings, and stuff, without asking me.

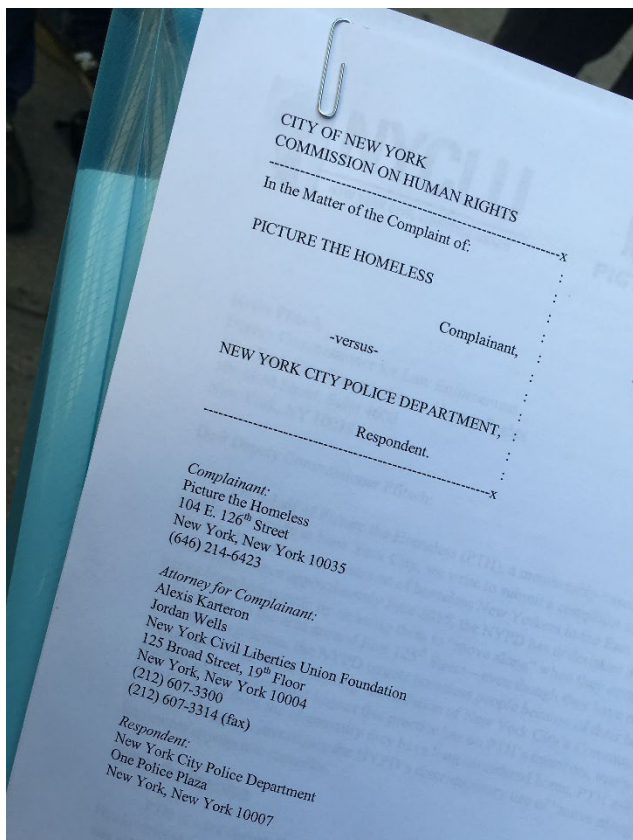


*Nikita Price, PTH Civil Rights Campaign Hands Off the Homeless rally at One Police Plaza. December 14, 2016*

# 2016: PTH FILES FIRST LAWSUIT

## Under the Community Safety Act

**James Doctor:**  
I think that was like more or less around April of 2016. I guess we more or less noticed more presence and the police more or less like harassing people, "Oh, you can't stay here. You all can't stay there. You all got to go over there. You all got to go over there. No, you've got to go over there."



*PTH complaint against the NYPD for violating the Community Safety Act, May 26, 2016*

Where do you all want us to go? You say we can't stay here, but there's no reason why we can't be there. All day long, this is what they're doing, but this has been going on since like I said, April 2016, around the time when I really noticed that the police was more or less like harassing people! There ain't no other way to put it.



*PTH Civil Rights campaign rally and press conference, filing the complaint against the NYPD with the NYC Human Rights Commission. May 2016*



**Joo-Hyun Kang:** One of the things that struck me about Picture the Homeless, which I think is a discipline, because it doesn't exist with all organizations, grassroots or otherwise, is that PTH members in meetings tried to be clear about when they were speaking for Picture the Homeless versus when they had an idea themselves. That's a practice of accountability that I just don't think is as common as we would like it to be. We want it to be more common, but it's just not that common.

But it's also part of what makes Picture the Homeless's practice around movement building so important. Picture the Homeless doesn't speak for just one or two people. It speaks

for members. The conditions that members face change at different times, so what might have been true a year ago is not true or might be different, two years after that depending on what the actual conditions are. I feel like we experience, and I experience, a rigor that Picture the Homeless members brought to meetings or actions or things that I was out with them, that is not always present with a lot of organizations. It's a gift that doesn't just arise organically in some romanticized ways. It's cultivated. It's developed. It's supported.

And a sense of real solidarity. I feel like one of the things about Picture the Homeless members, whether it was in lobby visits or doing security at actions, or wherever else was, my observation, experience, has always been the Picture the Homeless members practice solidarity in a very deep and meaningful way, that wasn't just, "Well, if you do this for me, I'll do this for you." It's that, this is right, we can do it, and we can help—which is really about movement building.

It's not about tactical wins. It's about long-term relationship building. My experience has been that Picture the Homeless members are always down to help support various causes and it's not transactional, it's not an expectation of, "We're doing this because you did that, or we're only doing this if you do that." It's really in the spirit of, we need justice for all our people, and this is one of the ways that we're going to help fight for that. So, Picture the Homeless members throw down on it, which is just not as common as we wish it was.



**James Doctor:** Honestly, I would say it made me feel good to know that I was giving back and stuff—helping, when people helped me out, you know? And it was my turn that I could give



a helping hand and stuff, and it made me feel good. And then, like I said, just from the upbringing that I had, caring for other people, and then to see people living like that, and going through it with them, and stuff. I just felt that somebody had to speak out, and let it be known what we're going through.



## 2016: RECLAIMING SPACE

### Hoodstock

In 2016, the Dept of Corrections outlawed hoodies in all NYS prisons. Folks locked up in Sing-Sing organized and donated their hoodies to PTH to help out homeless folks, and all they asked is that we

include message of solidarity message with them. Donald Anthonyson, Not4Prophet and Lynn Lewis came up with a solidarity message,

linking the struggles of folks who are homeless with those that are imprisoned. We gave out a few hundred hoodies, had a speak-out and poetry slam, music and food and turned a space of repression to one of liberation.



# WHOSE STREETS? OUR STREETS!

**Charmel Lucas:** Picture the Homeless was always a little bit of fun. Especially at some of them meetings. But you just didn't know who was going to show up! What was very empowering was going on protest marches. And I had spoken to you, I think later that evening. It was that big march, "Hands up. Don't shoot." Over 14<sup>th</sup> Street, all the way down and around, shut down 14<sup>th</sup>... I enjoyed that.

I enjoyed the protests. I enjoyed *shutting stuff down*. I enjoyed people saying, "Yeah!" The ones that couldn't come on the protests, and they were on the sidewalk saying, "Yeah!" The bus drivers and the truck drivers, and the cab drivers and everybody honking! Yeah, they didn't mind. They didn't give a freak. We were stopping up traffic. I enjoyed that. And the best part out of it? Was right there at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, at that little police station. I was with Al and somebody else and we said, "Oh, Hands Up, Don't Shoot! Hands Up..." And the momentum? And them cops, they stood back like, "Oh." They just looked.

They stood back like this, and we said, "Hands Up, Don't Shoot! Hands Up, Don't Shoot!" And we got all so close up in a cop's face, and he didn't know what the fuck to do. That felt good! You know that really felt good... Because I ain't into intimidating people, but I'm gonna say it really felt good. "Hands up, Don't Shoot! Hands Up, Don't Shoot! Hands Up, Don't..." I mean the momentum went boom-boom-boom-boom—and they got faster and faster and crazier—nobody cursed... Hands Up, Don't Shoot! Hands Up, Don't Shoot! And that's what we did. Hands Up, Don't Shoot. And then the cops were like... Yeah, we mean what we saying.



**Maria Walles:** You know, when the whole George Floyd situation happened. That's when everybody and their mama came out. I think Nikita was like, "You better go out, Maria! You better just go." And that's what I did. And that's when I saw Charmel, and we got together, and we hung out for a couple of hours.



**James Doctor:** One of the biggest things I learned, being involved with Picture the Homeless was unity, Lynn. Y'all showed everybody—together we can accomplish so much more than one person standing out there trying to fight a war against a thousand—it's not going to happen. But, just that one person standing out there and letting them know like, "This ain't right." You best believe, there's somebody else in that crowd too feel the same way as that person. And it's, like I said, the domino effect, and eventually everybody's going to come out, "No. This is not right. This is not right. We got to do something about it."



**Shaun Lin:** I think about how the office itself was a safe space for folks. That sometimes people will come to the office for organizing things, but oftentimes people would come to the office because that's their living room, that's where they see their friends and catch up. It really was a community space; it was a movement space for homeless folks in the city.

A lot of the work at Picture the Homeless, I think, is just holding space for people. Sometimes not even necessarily that people want your input, they just want someone to listen.

So, I really tried to prioritize holding space for folks, in their personal lives, that I would be available as an ear to listen if folks ever wanted. I really tried to be intentional about doing that, in addition to the organizing work, just because I felt like it was really important to do that



**Sam J. Miller:** I think there's a base level on which it was always really important to who we were that we were a space where we were happy to see people, where we welcomed people, where—when they walked in the door with their bags, or their stress from whatever they were going through, or any number of—you know, the shit they were carrying, that had been heaped upon them by the cops, or the shelter, or the system, or the newspapers. That we were smiling, that we were welcoming them, that we were happy to see them and that if they needed to take twenty minutes in the bathroom that no one was pounding on the door for them to get the hell out.

And that if they wanted to just sit in a meeting and not say anything, that we were a space where people who didn't get a lot of respect in other places, got respect. And that where people got treated like animals, or objects, or the enemy, were treated as people, as friends, as comrades.

**Nikita Price:** I've learned this from homeless people, and from Picture the Homeless—you make do with what you got. Homeless people don't have a lot. Picture the Homeless doesn't have a lot. But what we do have, we make it work.

What Picture the Homeless has done is always shown that it's a myth about homeless people. We've gotten legislation—on that fucking board in there—Housing Not Warehousing—that homeless people put together. We're part of a coalition where there's two pieces of legislation that should have been passed with some other legislation back in 2013—the Right to Know Act. Homeless people are doing this shit. Homeless people are doing this shit. We're not doing it by ourselves, but we've injected ourselves into the conversation—on housing, on policing, your civil rights, your basic rights, your basic needs.

And I think that says a lot about Picture the Homeless. I think that brings a lot out of me. You just saw three people walk in this door, that were here, left, and came back. That has a lot to say about this organization and if it has a little bit to do with me, then I'm grateful. I'll own that. I'll own that.



# PTH CIVIL RIGHTS WRAP-UP

**2003** Won a settlement in federal court against the NYPD and City of New York, prohibiting selective enforcement of the law targeting homeless New Yorkers

**2003** Created pop education materials and gave workshops in shelters and soup kitchen about homeless voting rights

**2004** Launched Operation Cardboard Box, a network of mutual aid safe havens in Manhattan churches during the RNC

**2007** Launched our Disorderly Conduct Campaign with created relationships with other anti-police brutality groups

**2013** Won passage of the Community Safety Act, including the first local law naming housing status as a protected status from police harassment.

**2014** Forced the NYPD to cancel the publicly announced removal of homeless New Yorkers from the subway system

**2014** Forced NYPD Commissioner Bratton to publicly renounce shelter raids by the NYPD Warrant squad

**2016** Filed the first legal action against the NYPD in the NYC Commission on Human Rights for illegal targeting of homeless New Yorkers

**2016** Won compensation for three homeless men whose property was destroyed by the NYPD.

**Overall:** We built solidarity with police reform movement, educating about the impact of selective enforcement and Broken Windows on homeless New Yorkers, and built long lasting relationships through solidarity.



**Jean Rice:** So, equal justice before the law is still a myth. Probably in my lifetime I will never see *judicial equality*. But what I *can do* is, like we at Picture the Homeless always say, “We can make a difference.” We can *diminish the impact*. We can educate the public, about how America can never be great when it doesn't live up to its national credo.



# Organizing Lessons Learned:

- Diversity of tactics is necessary
- Without direct action we don't win anything
- Continual outreach is crucial
- Document what's happening in the streets.
- Collective analysis of issues and solutions
- Political Education about the root causes and current conditions
- Research
- Write your own reports
- Be inviting to folks, especially folks sleeping in the streets, parks, etc.
- Know Your Rights education
- Support homeless folks to visibly represent the group
- Creative actions create space for media coverage and narrative shifting
- Whether you're filing a lawsuit or proposing legislation, direct action is needed to keep up momentum and pressure
- Take the action to spaces of oppression
- Convert spaces of oppression to spaces of liberation
- Have fun

## Narrators:

Anthony Williams  
Charmel Lucas  
James Tracy  
Joo-Hyun Kang  
Lynn Roberts  
Nikita Price  
Rob Robinson  
Shaun Lin

Betty Yu  
Floyd Parks  
Jean Rice  
Kazembe Balagun  
Marcus Moore  
Paul Boden  
Rogers  
Willie Baptist

Charley Heck  
James Doctor  
James Tracy  
Lynn Lewis  
Maria Walles  
Rev. Liz Maxwell  
Sam J. Miller

# CHANTS

We're New Yorkers, We have Rights  
We won't give up without a Fight

Tell de Blasio, Tell the Cops  
Homeless Abuse Has Got To Stop

NYPD Destroyed My Stuff  
Homeless People Say Enough is Enough!

Two, Four,  
Six, Eight  
Police  
Abuse is  
What We  
Hate

Sleeping on  
the Streets  
is Not a  
Crime  
Give Me An Apartment  
Stop Wasting My Time!



*Know Your Rights Mural, artist Sophia Dawson, collaborating organizations, Picture the Homeless, Justice Committee, People's Justice. Harlem NY*

## About this Project

Zines created by the Picture the Homeless Oral History Project are based on oral history interviews with homeless social justice leaders, staff, and board members of Picture the Homeless (PTH) as well as political allies and incorporate archival materials and public records. This is part of a series of campaign zines, covering highlights of each organizing campaign.

The Picture the Homeless Oral History Project covers the first 17 years of Picture the Homeless (PTH). We began with homeless leaders who have been with PTH for a minimum of 10 years because we want to understand why homeless folks came to PTH – and why they stayed and how PTH built a powerful, homeless led organization.

Our intention is to support homeless and poor folks organizing by listening and understanding what PTH meant to the people who carried out the work. Standing up and fighting for your rights isn't easy, coming together to collectively identify issues and solutions is real work. The sacrifices of these leaders were many, often in the face of extreme hardship. Picture the Homeless has changed many lives and made a difference in New York City, around the U.S. and internationally. The PTH Oral History project is a work in progress. Email us if you would like to stay in touch or have something to contribute!

**The Picture the Homeless Oral History Project**  
[pth.oral.history@gmail.com](mailto:pth.oral.history@gmail.com)