

# The Picture the Homeless Oral History Project

Don't Talk About Us: Talk With Us!

## Resistance Relationships and the Power of Movement Building



*PTH Civil Rights Campaign with Communities United for Police Reform in support of the passage of the Community Safety Act. August 22, 2013*

Picture the Homeless (PTH) was founded in November 1999 by Lewis Haggins and Anthony Williams while staying in Bellevue Men's shelter.

PTH worked to move the issues of homelessness to the center of the social justice movement, in particular around the issues of housing and policing brutality. This zine offers an overview of what those movement relationships meant to PTH as well as what the impact of being in movement with PTH had on others.

PTH built resistance relationships with campaigns and organizations that aligned with PTH's mission and campaign demands. These included members and staff of other groups, students, academics, faith leaders, journalists, elected officials, squatters, anarchists, socialists, and regular old democratic party folks.

Essential to PTH's movement building work was the psychic disruption of homeless folks representing PTH in meetings and the media. Bold direct actions and visual symbols of resistance communicated and educated. A sense of solidarity, and daring were all part of PTH's movement building as were parties, fun and building social networks across movements in New York City, nationally and internationally.

This is not a comprehensive PTH history with dates and timelines. This zine contains some of the highlights of PTH's movement building work, and the thinking behind PTH's development of movement relationships, based on oral history interviews with PTH members and staff, allies, archival materials, and public documents.



**Raquel Namuche-Pacheco:** I think, for the very first time I learned about how direct action *literally gets the goods*. People throw that phrase around a lot, but at PTH it was what members lived, and I thought that was really, really powerful.

I think it's the first time I ever learned as an organizer what that meant. I feel like that has driven all the organizing work I've done since then.

The kind of organizing that I do in my free time is trying to be an example of what I learned at PTH. I tell anyone I can about what I learned at PTH, because it left a huge imprint on me as an organizer.

I just learned a lot about like the resilience of people and just, sort of like the struggle—and the struggle for housing is real. I'm not saying this adequately, but I just think I owe a lot to PTH.



## MOVEMENT ROOTS: EARLY RESISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS

**Anthony Williams:** *Wake Up Call* was the name of the show, and that started, I think, at six [a.m.] It was Amy Goodman, Bernard White, and Errol Maitland, and Robert Knight, who passed away. So, we walk into the building on Wall Street, and we go up to the tenth floor, and there's this big studio. We go in.

Errol Maitland comes out, and Lou says, "This is Anthony Williams, and this is the guy that you need to hear from, because I think his story is powerful." He says, "Well, we want to hear what the plight is with the homeless. We don't know what's going on with the homeless. We know that things are different here in the city, but we just don't understand what's going on with the Giuliani administration."

And Lou said, "Well, I'll talk about Giuliani. I got that. Don't worry, I'll talk to you about Giuliani. But you need to hear from Anthony of what's really going on with the homeless, because he knows."



**Anthony Williams:** A couple days later, Lewis comes to me, and goes, "I got this article about this organization on the Lower East Side." I said, "Yeah?" He goes, "It's called CHARAS, and they're having problems with their building, but they have plenty of space for meetings! I want to have a meeting with the homeless. We should have a homeless meeting there." The next day, he comes back, and goes, "I got a waiver. They're not going to charge us to use the space!"



**Anthony Williams:** I think he says, "Come with me to CHARAS." So, I went down there with him, and he introduced me to Chino. And that's when Chino said, "Do you mind if a friend of mine, she's a woman, she's interested in coming to your meeting. Would you mind if she came?" I said, "No. I don't mind. Do you mind, Lou?" He goes, "No." He said, "Okay."

Now, Steve Loff, a film guy, heard us on WBAI. Well, it wasn't him, it was his girl that heard us, and said, "You've got to hook up with these guys. And I got a phone number, because Anthony left a phone number, on WBAI, how to reach him." And guess who the phone number was from? Jennifer's phone number, 475-688...

So, Steve Loff comes, and he says, "Can I come to your meeting?" So, now we got you, we got Steve Loff, that wants to film and interview, then we got Lewis and another guy, and your son... And we set up *all those chairs*.

I felt kind of disappointed. I felt like, "Dag man, like, wow. They don't care? This room should be full of homeless people!

Right? This room should be *packed* with homeless people, and we only got like four people...”

**Lewis:** Who weren't homeless.

Williams: Except the one guy who was talking about how his shelter was, and then Lou said, “Hey, we're here to change the system. We understand your plight, but we're here to change the system.” And I think that's what got you.

**Lewis:** That's what got me. I'll never forget that.



**Lynn Lewis:** I was very fortunate to move to the Lower East Side. I lived at Cooper Square. I met Chino. I started to go to CHARAS. I met amazing people, there was a whole network of folks. Then I hear there's two homeless guys starting a group, and being in that space means you're part of a larger movement.

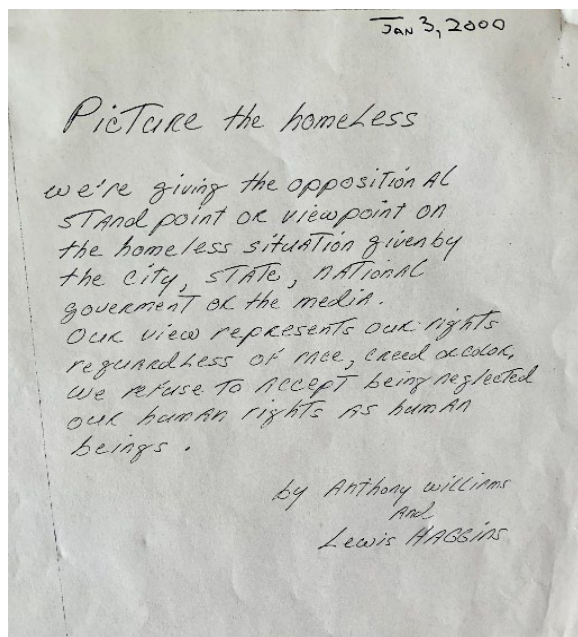


**Carlos Chino Garcia:** When I first met them, especially Lewis, I had respect because I saw him coming to meetings. And when you're a brother that's down-and-out, and you want to develop yourself and clean yourself up, it shows that you're serious.

I've dealt with a lot of groups throughout the city and the country with a lot of people that have an idea, and you have to encourage them quickly to become serious with that idea. It

wasn't just me. It was Tony and Armando and we wanted to give them that spirit, "Go ahead, go for it. You got an idea, go for it." And not only you've got an idea, *you've got an idea that is necessary!* It's not an idea like "Hey, Hey" just any idea. Because, at that time, there wasn't a group. They were advocates.

I sincerely felt that they were sincere about that idea, and it's an idea that didn't exist in the city—of homeless people forming their own advocacy group. It didn't exist that I know of you know. Then seeing Lewis coming day after day to the AA meetings and basically trying to clean himself, I felt that he needed something to put time into, and that was it. I don't think we knew of a group, of any other group that was doing that.



**Anthony Williams:** After the mission statement was written, after the contract we did with CHARAS, he asked me a question. He says to me, "What do you think about Sharpton?" And he showed me the National Action Network brochure. He says, "What don't you see on this brochure?"

Anything about homelessness. Would you like to come with me to the National Action Network and meet the Rev?" And I was like, "Okay. Okay, let's see where we're going to go with this." And so, Sharpton goes, "Oh, there's Lewis Haggins! He started out with us." I was like, "wow."



**Dave Powell:** It's just great to be with those guys and watching them work and just watching them think—like literally, figuring it out from scratch. It's not that they didn't have supporters, or they didn't have people that knew what they were about to do was important. But they didn't come with any institution that was like, "Oh yeah! Great idea. Let us know what you need."

They had to build that shit. They built that shit brick by brick, you know? Absolutely and totally, and with genuine, genuine curiosity about, like what is the best way to get there, you know? Genuine work, of thinking it through strategically. I remember just the weight of those conversations.

*Dave Powell, Lewis Haggins, Met Council Gracie Mansion sleep-out. 2000*





**Anthony Williams:** The Martin Luther King Day of Action was some squatters and I forget the guy's name, but he was in the building, occupying the abandoned property, bringing it to light with the media there, to talk about abandoned properties, and that we're doing this on Martin Luther King's birthday to show that. It was a whole organized thing, and with the Lower East Side, and D.A.N. [Direct Action Network], and a few other folks.

They had it all chained up and everything, to hold it down, and then me and Lewis were outside, Picture the Homeless. So, I'm standing outside, and Lewis starts bring the media to me, "You got to talk to him—him! See that guy there? You got to talk to him. "Talk to him? Well, who is he?" He said, "Well he's with Picture the Homeless! He's one of the guys that you need to talk to. You need to hear from him." And I *talked about* the significance of abandoned property, and about homelessness, and how we need housing, right? And people saw me talking.



**Anthony Williams:** Lewis understood starting an organization, organizing, and with his skills with outreach and media, and taking your story, just like with [Michael] Stewart's story, the people that were affected by the killings, the Amadou Diallo's, and the Patrick Dorismonds... That's the kind of stuff Lou was doing with the National Action Network.

I never did it before! I don't know how to go and talk to newspapers, and go to the *Voice*, and go to WBAI, and go to WBLS... And he knew all these people! Not just those people, but he knew Beady... He knew people... He knew the guy that owned the Cotton Club! He knew people that owned the Apollo... [Percy Ellis] Sutton! He knew these people.

Lewis was also doing outreach on the Lower East Side. Not just with CHARAS, but with Aresh [Javadi]. He was hanging out in this iron frog with the Green Guerillas, the Esperanza Garden folks. And he goes, "Ant, you've got to come check this out. They got a laptop up there, and you climb up there, and they're holding down this garden." And I went up there, and it was like, wow.



**Brooke Lehman:** Our first meetings, and every single meeting for the Direct Action Network was in CHARAS community center, and that's where we met Picture the Homeless. I think our first meeting was in January of 2000, which was the same time that Picture the Homeless had their first meeting.

We were coming into this amazing Puerto Rican community center, and I saw the organizing that was happening. I mean, upstairs were the artists, but downstairs there was just activists meeting everywhere.

So to me, Picture the Homeless was a fixture already. I don't think I realized that it was new. It just was like these amazing guys I met. I met Anthony, and became friends with Anthony, quickly.

I knew Slima and Chino from the Institute for Social Ecology, I knew Slima quite well. I remember hanging out in the office with you and Chino, and you and Chino were a couple then, and I remember your daughter. It was just like, that was the scene in the office, at CHARAS. Picture the Homeless had a desk in there, if I'm not wrong. So to me, that was Picture the Homeless headquarters.

The opportunity to work with Picture the Homeless just felt so lucky to us. The serendipity was not just that, "Oh, here's this issue." But here's this issue that is being addressed not by like a social service organization, or by a nonprofit with a very traditional sort of model. These are people that were living the struggle, and that were coming together like us, scrappy as hell and with heart and a desire to meet the need.

I remember, just being in awe of Picture the Homeless and just learning about a different way of organizing, by just really organizing with a base of folks who were struggling with homelessness, and seeing Picture the Homeless as a familial type of organization. Like an organization that was really not just about the issues, but about the people that were involved in organizing. Picture the Homeless talked about itself very clearly as a family. And I saw it that way, and I felt myself to be a part of it, because we all felt like we were a bunch of weirdos, you know? I'm like this girl from the Upper East Side. Like, what the hell was I doing in this? Why was I even allowed to be doing that kind of organizing?



**Dave Powell:** I don't remember Anthony or Lou having any time for bullshit. They were never going to pigeonhole one person and not work with them. They weren't going to give you a radical test, or a legitimacy test.

What they were doing was radical, but they were very practical. I remember that about them, and PTH as well. You know, just very smart, very practical, very strategic, they understood that we couldn't afford the bullshit basically. You fixate on those small things and your enemies eat you alive, you know?

**Anthony Williams:** It was *important* somehow, to talk about green space, homelessness, and housing, and align them together somehow, which was hard. It wasn't an easy sell. I mean, I don't think it was, *but we did it*.

We were able to do a press conference with the Green Guerillas, and talk about the bulldozing of a garden and space, but also no affordable housing. You want to knock down a garden to build luxury housing, but you're not building housing for low-income people!

We're totally not for developers bulldozing gardens for luxury housing. If they want to build housing for folks that are homeless, then we're all for that. But no, we're not for you bulldozing a garden! So that's what I talked about in a press conference, with Aresh and them and we talked about homelessness, standing in front of bulldozers.

So, not only did Lewis have a relationship with Aresh, he had a relationship with Michael Shenker, and he had a relationship with Tobocman, Seth Tobocman. And there was another guy that was also involved with Picture the Homeless, from Food Not Bombs.

So, Lewis had these linkages with the community on the Lower East Side, and the organizing efforts, but he was taking the homeless issue, along with the housing issue and the bulldozing of the gardens, and bringing us all together, and then the ultimate was the squatters.

What Lewis was doing was organizing people, with the skills he had with creating the National Action Network, with top leaders of the community, and also leadership within the Black religious community. He did a lot of work with the Black community when it came to police brutality, and he did a lot of work on that with the National Action Network.

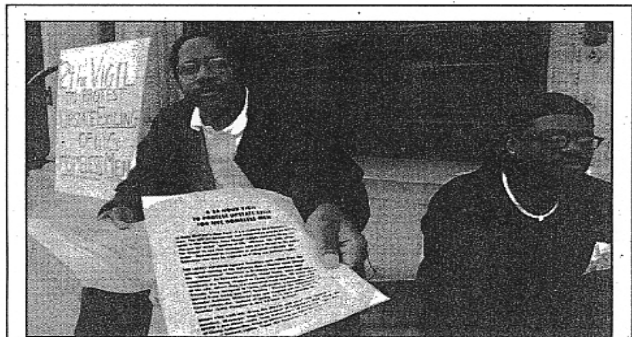
# THE FIRST PTH OFFICE SPACE

**Anthony Williams:** So we go into CHARAS, and Chino says, "Why don't you go check out Judson?" And then I was like, "Fuck them churches!" You know what I mean? Like, "Fuck them. I'm not going, I'm not, no. Fuck it, I'm done." And Lou was like, "Anthony, we got to go to Judson. We have to go talk to them." I said, "No, I don't have to talk to them." And I said, "I'll walk over there with you, but I'm not going in that church to talk to them."



Lewis went in the church and talked to Peter Laarman. And he came back out, and said, "Anthony! They want to meet with us. The reverend wants to meet with you." I was like, "Hell no, I don't want to meet with him." He goes, "I need you to talk to the Rev, to Reverend Peter Laarman. He wants to hear what we have to say. So, we should at least let him hear us out. Okay?"

*The Villager 3/29/2000*



*Villager photo by Beth Bianculli*

## Picture the Homeless

Last Wednesday, two homeless men Anthony Williams, right, and Lewis Haggins, staged a 24-hour vigil on the steps of Judson Memorial Church on Washington Sq. S. to protest the city's homeless shelter policies, which they say include early-morning police searches in which men are thrown up against the walls on warrants for minor infractions like public urination. The pair recently formed a new advocacy group, Picture the Homeless.

**Anthony Williams:** So, after the twenty-four-hour action, Peter said, “We have an office downstairs. If we can clean that out, we can give you an office.” And I’m like, “Really?” He goes, “Yeah, we just need to clean it out.” So, we got a phone. Then we got a computer, site visits was coming to see what we do. You know, you can’t show people something that’s not there! Right? It has to be there for you to show them, and the only way to get what you need is by showing them that you have something unique, and you have something that’s *worthwhile* for them to come and support. And we had that. We had all of that. We had every bit of it.



**Anthony Williams:** Going to San Francisco, that was an eye-opening experience, because we don’t see homeless people in these places, doing these things. If the Coalition on Homelessness [San Francisco] was the first homeless organization in the country, and the people that you see in that organization, who are homeless and formerly homeless, are working in the office, and sleeping there... And I’m sleeping on the floor, and doing interviews with people about New York, and these are major hubs. It’s nothing to take lightly, you know?

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 [being] treated differently.

**Anthony Williams:** I think it was important for us to see, instead of me seeing it, I wanted everybody else to see it too.

It was important that they got to see *an organization* that was run by homeless and formerly homeless folks, that they're actually doing it. It could be done! Yes, 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.



**Paul Boden:** I was really energized about the people that came out to [San Francisco] 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!

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—well, just start stirring some shit. Like, you'll figure it out as you go. If you listen to people, you'll figure it out.

## PTH CREATES A MOVEMENT SPACE FOR HOMELESS NEW YORKERS

**James Doctor:** One of the biggest things I learned, being involved with Picture the Homeless was unity, Lynn. Because y'all showed everybody like, 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 that feels the same way as that person. And it's like 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."



**James Doctor:** I know at Picture the Homeless, a couple of meetings I've been in were chaotic with disagreement and stuff. Not everybody has the same opinion, not everybody sees eye to eye, so of course there's going to be a disagreement, here and there.

But Picture the Homeless, taught everybody—first breathe, and hear what the person's saying, and then respond, and like—listen. You don't have to agree with them, but if you listen to them, at least you understand them, so you know how to better deal with them, and y'all can come to a better solution toward the problem and stuff.

But you're not going to get there if everybody's just running off, loud mouthing, and ain't nobody listening to one another.



That is one of the things that Picture the Homeless taught me—don't forget the unity, because there's no little me, no big I's, and stuff, *it's we*, and together as a whole is how we're going to get it accomplished.

What I'm trying to say is it's going to take one person to speak and bring the problem *out*, but it's going to take a *whole group* to make the solution and solve the problem to fix whatever the problem was. But unless we sit down and talk to each other, we don't know what the problem is, or how to fix the problem.



*Nikita Price, PTH Civil Rights planning meetings. October 14, 2015*

**Rogers:** There were disparate voices, but I didn't see enough people being organized into one voice until I was reading some of what Picture the Homeless, some of what Anthony and Lewis had done and were saying.

That was the coming together of united voices against the gentrification, against the profiteering, against the elite landowners and, if you want to call it, the municipal land barons. That was part of what was being done by Picture the Homeless in many ways better than anyone else was doing it. So, I said, "This is something I see, I understand, and I agree with." That's what would have drawn me to Picture the Homeless, to their meetings, and then eventually to 116<sup>th</sup> Street. It's like, "Okay, if these people are doing the same thing that I'm doing, then maybe I should be doing it with them, as opposed to being a lone wolf someplace."



**Frank Morales:** I had never been in a place that was quite like that. In other words, the office, the organization, and as it manifested itself in the office, was a place of a homeless movement, a movement of people who were committed to dealing with this issue, right?

The only experience that I had had in terms of housing issues, was either in organizations where I was doing tenant organizing, and all that... And it's a bunch of well-meaning bureaucrats, and others, and so on.

So, this was unique. For me it was enlightening. It was a new experience really. And a very *welcome* experience. I was very impressed by everything. The mood of the people—which was on one hand kind of militant, and concerned, and on the other

hand, fun and kind of loving with one another. The space was multifunctional, you know—it had the meeting thing, but it also had comfort and so forth and I remember one of the things that I was interested in doing was the Thursday night meal, you know. So, I loved making use of the kitchen and all that.



**Kazembe Balagun:** It seemed to me people took the running of the office really seriously, but something that really stuck in my mind, I remember one time that there was a guy there who was going through some sort of distress. It was something going on, and he just was acting out. And you were so calm about it, and so caring and not stressed at all, and it really just hit me. I was like, “Wow, there people really care.”



**Anika Paris:** Picture the Homeless consistently put forth a really radically different idea of what the city could be. I mean like with Intro 48, that there are like *clear problems* that anybody can see.

PTH had, and I guess still has, a lot of allies across the spectrum. Like, there are definitely city planners and academics who have like contributed in one way or another to PTH campaigns and efforts and actions.

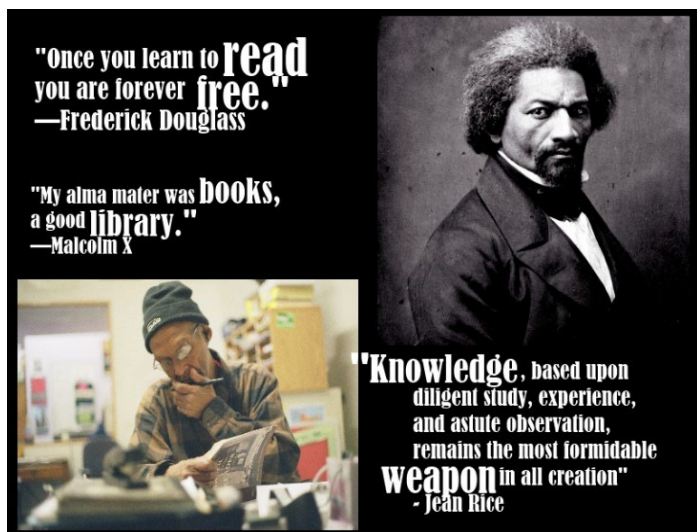


*Peter Marcuse, PTH Housing Campaign, rally and press conference demanding Intro 48 be calendared and voted on by New York City Council. September 29, 2010*

But the issue of vacancy, the issue of inadequate housing, the issue of police harassment and overreach and like the necessity of *sleep* and the necessity of healthcare... I don't know if you looked at the policy proposals that PTH was putting out and like what was being voted on in City Council, it was almost like two separate cities, you know? And very different understandings of how they should operate. And those ideas were created, crafted, discussed over coffee and mad creamer among homeless folks, you know?

Like, a lot of folks who didn't have formal education, people who had been street homeless, people who had been kicked out of their homes, people who had health issues, people who, in a lot of formulations should just be the recipient of services. But it was like radical city planning, sort of... Yeah. Yeah. I think that's how I would put it.

**Jean Rice:** So, based on those two components, I said—well, my beloved Picture the Homeless, we cannot depend on our adversaries to educate us to the point where we can liberate ourselves. So, we have to develop a formula, and a curricula, and a culture and an atmosphere, where we can *truly educate ourselves*, and move our brain past indoctrination to education. And then we can be in the vanguard of *a movement* that will succeed in making America live up to its original credo.



*Postcard for Jean Rice and Ariel Dorfman Dialogue at Riverside Church, November 17, 2005*

## A GLOBAL HOMELESS MOVEMENT

**Anika Paris:** I think about things that happened at PTH or conversations that I *only had* because of PTH like, daily. Just in terms of my understanding of the world and organizing and movements, I remember learning about the Shackdwellers, and the MST [Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra] in Brazil, and I went to Detroit to the U.S. Social Forum with

PTH. We had a whole contingent. I remember Detroit really clearly.

I remember there was somebody from the Shackdwellers who came through the office, and it was just a really chill conversation, This was just a bunch of people around the table talking. And I remember he said like, “You know they give us these rights, but you can’t afford your rights.” And I’ve like repeated that so many times. Yeah, that was really revelatory for me

*Alease Lowe,  
Arvernetta  
Henry, Darya,  
Maggie, with*

*AbM/Shack-  
dwellers  
Movement in  
South Africa  
founder and  
President  
S'bu Zikode  
visits Picture  
the Homeless  
in the Bronx.  
November  
11<sup>th</sup>, 2010*



**Arvernetta Henry:** I have to say, Picture the Homeless has done *a lot for me*. I have travelled across the world through having people from other countries come into our organization, speaking about the homeless plight and how they would like to see how Picture the Homeless handled it, and how they were able to get the government to listen to them.



I'm talking about countries like South Africa, Germany, England. Different places coming to our country, coming to our organization, and interviewing us and asking questions, and we are able to impart that wisdom *and knowledge* that we learned from the leaders at Picture the Homeless!



**Jean Rice:** Picture are Homeless—seldom heard of, but often our footprint is there. From Istanbul—where people that are trying to reform a process that is not in the common good, when the people that fell between the cracks, where people end up being criminalized or vandalized—having their rights, basic

human rights trampled upon... When they come all the way from Istanbul to New York City and seek Picture the Homeless out and use *us* as a model.



*Delegation from Brazil visiting PTH office, 2016*

When the Shackdwellers from South Africa come to Picture the Homeless and *use us as a model!* I mean, I sometimes get that Urkel complex and say, “Gee! Did we do that?!” It's unbelievable that where God and this chain of events has led my organization and I'm proud to be part of that.



*Jean Rice with AbM/Shackdwellers Movement in South Africa founder and President S'bu Zikode during visit with PTH on a walking tour through Harlem. November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010*



**Reverend Liz Theoharis:** There's an award winning film about a group of homeless people in South Africa who are taking on the system, in post-apartheid South Africa. And there's such similarities to these young people fighting for their lives, and their rights and their housing rights, and showing up in different places with a constitution. There's lots of moments where it's really parallel to the kind of work that Jean Rice and others are doing in the United States, where you know, you show up and you tell people, "These are your rights." Or, "This is a violation of my rights and of your rights." And the same things happening, basically because of similar conditions and





*Charley Heck, PTH Civil Rights leader, 2017*

there are these amazing leaders! And then they got to meet each other, right?

And so, shortly after the leadership school that we had in West Virginia, there was this really bad attack in one of the settlements. And so, Picture the Homeless and the Poverty Initiative and a couple of groups organized this

protest outside of

the South African consulate. And what we're told is it has this really big influence. That—so we have this group of homeless folk and other poor people and students and domestic workers who had all kind of come to know each other at the school and a series of different things, showing up and saying like, "We have solidarity with people in our situation and in similar situations in South Africa." Because it's the United States, South Africa didn't want to be embarrassed basically by people in the United States calling them out for what they're doing to their people, and so it means this really big victory actually, where they stop the repression.



*The Poverty Initiative, PTH and Domestic Workers United solidarity rally with the Shackdwellers. October 9, 2009*

And again, it's Jean and Mrs. Henry and different folks like that, who are leading the chants are leading the charge and who are willing to kind of talk back to the consulate cops. But again, to secure more safety for shack dwellers in South Africa, at the same time they're standing up for people's rights here.

So it was beautiful when then, we have this film screening [*Dear Mandela*], and the New York premiere is dedicated to Picture the Homeless and leaders from Picture the Homeless, including Jean, are right there in the story. In fact, in the film, there are people wearing Picture the Homeless shirts! And so, you can see the South Africans, who have heard about people organizing in the U.S., and they're wearing those shirts because they're showing their solidarity, too.

# BUILDING AN INTERSECTIONAL MOVEMENT ANALYSIS

**Lynn Lewis:** I think that for Picture the Homeless—for members, to be included in coalition spaces that are intersectional and that multiple communities—homeless folks identify as members of more than the homeless community. To be there, for Picture the Homeless members, is very important because they're there as poor people. They're there as people of color. They're there as, all the different identities that they embody.



**Jean Rice:** 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. I am so encouraged by the City Council making homeless—being undomiciled, a protected status. That goes a long way, but it is still is not enough. Because we still have homeless people being targeted. We still have people of color being targeted by selective enforcement.



**DeBoRah Dickerson:** People of color are one of the main ones that happen to be homeless. And there's all kinds of statistical information that says that. I can't exactly give you the percentage, and sometimes I don't like giving out percentages because we get caught up in the number game, and the number game makes me mad. I'm going to do, what I do. I got two eyes, and I see.

When you have foreclosures, mostly people of color. When we went to Barnard College, they talked about banks that was doing foreclosures. There are different organizations that talk about the foreclosures. We know the banks that were giving these foreclosures, and they have been notorious for that. That is a racial disparity. If you got foreclosures, it's mostly Black, because eventually they are going to become homeless.

In one of the meetings that I went to, they did not want to talk about that. But race always plays into anything, and we have to be honest about it. Because I am of African American descent, we know that certain groups are privileged. We got to keep it real. So, am I happy about that? No! Do I feel a little somewhat angry? Yeah! But look who has the social economics, privileges. That's why Trump was able to get what he had. Let's keep that real—because he was doing real estate.



**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 seemed to think that broken windows operated in the common good, and it was *okay*.

Picture the Homeless, along with a few other allies, were quick to point out that, you know what? 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 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.*



*PTH Civil Rights committee invasion of Manhattan Institute offices, pasting the names of people killed by the police, written on bloody hands. December 2014.*

**Shaun Lin:** I think in all actions it was both the specific incident of what happened and that 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.



**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—like on their very person, as citizens. And that was very powerful!

I think it was the first organization that I had seen that had a civil rights division. But it was something that would lead the basis for us to talk about citizenship now—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.



**Sam J. Miller:** There's a level on which, when you start to pay attention to homelessness and you start to really understand it, it sort of turns your whole understanding of the world on its end. I think oftentimes people slot homelessness into a box in their mind, where it's not threatening and not scary and doesn't have anything to do with them, "Oh, that's that thing, and that's really sad, but that's not something that I need to think too deeply about."

So, when you start to really understand the issue and see how intimately it's connected to everything that happens in this city and in the country and how intimately it's connected to racism and the high cost of housing and so many issues that are important to lots of folks, it's kind of hard to not to get simultaneously really angry and really resolved to do something. So, while homelessness and housing had never been issues that were particularly important to me in my life as an activist and an organizer, I got really excited about it.



**Maria Walles:** Well, when it comes down to immigration, a lot of immigrants—some of them are homeless, some of them are not. And the bureaucracy and what they had to go through to travel to get to the United States... And the bureaucracy when it comes down to working, like in a restaurant, for example, and how they're not getting the wages that they deserve, and stuff.

I knew about May Day before I became homeless because someone told me about it. Once I got involved with the Solidarity center and they said, "Oh, we do May Day."





*Maria Waller, PTH Civil Rights committee, Union Square. May 1, 2010*

**Lynn Roberts:** It's hard to do that real intersectional work all the time. It's a challenge for any one of us individually, and it's certainly a challenge for us collectively. You know, we're still grappling with that and I'm getting ready to head to a convening next week with others who are trying to figure this out in this moment of post-Dobbs, and all that. I still believe it's possible. But I have to say, in terms of those most impacted determining the solutions and working with allies to achieve them, I still think that Picture the Homeless comes the closest to that for me.



**Sue Lob:** We wanted to do some work around housing, and I'm assuming I must have reached out to Picture the Homeless. I guess one of the things that I was really conscious of was that I didn't want to fight for housing in a way that was going to pit one group against the other.

So I didn't want to say, "Oh, you know—make battered women a priority and screw everybody else." There needed to be a bigger pot of affordable housing that everybody could get access to. So, I wanted to be allied with other groups that were fighting for affordable housing and I guess that's how I ended up with Picture the Homeless.



**DeBoRah Dickerson:** I find that important, in organizing and being a part of Picture the Homeless. getting information and having research. Researching the people that you're talking about or having a conversation, having that dialogue. Because if you don't know anything about them, then you can't have a conversation with them, or a dialogue with them. That's why I had been able to go different places to speak with people, which I enjoy. I enjoy speaking to them—because I want to learn what they're doing. I want to see their perception.



**James Tracy:** Picture the Homeless tends to be very, very proud of their connection to New York, but they're also equally proud of being connected with people all around the globe that are thinking and doing and being part of an anti-poverty movement.

And so, if you're connected to that yourself, you always know you're going to be welcome with Picture the Homeless people and they're always going to be interested in comparing notes like, "Hey, what's going on in your city?"

That's a form of research. That's a form of intellectual work, right? Sometimes, you don't realize you're being interviewed by them about strategies and tactics until after it's done. "Hey, how did you guys get that surplus property legislation going?" Things like that.

I've seen Picture the Homeless make connections to what's going on in San Francisco, but also what's going on in Brazil or what's going on in Hungary or what not and really encouraging people to think about that this is a global struggle. There's things to be learned from almost anybody that you could talk to across the globe that's involved with that, which is pretty unique because so much homelessness and housing stuff tends to be so hyper-focused on the neighborhood, right?



# HOMELESS REPRESENTATION AND MOVEMENT BUILDING

**Dave Powell:** I vividly remember Jean Rice speaking at a rally we had in support of the rent laws in Union Square, in 2003, vividly remember it. He was like the second speaker. I remember just being like, "Wow, okay. So this is like a new and important part of this coalition." You know, that's just really drilling down on the cause and effect of these things, and just standing up as homeless people and saying, "Okay, we're not rent stabilized now, or maybe we are now, but we were homeless previously, but we're here to tell you there's a direct link between these two things. And it's important that that link is articulated by homeless people directly."



**Marcus Moore:** This is not Marcus Moore's movement. This is the people's movement. So I have to get out there and continue to do *my share*. That could be anything from make a sign, do an interview, carry someone to get water, or ride my bike and just bring water to the people. It's something that I can continue to keep doing to support the people's movement, and this madness that's still going on with people not able to have decent places to live, you know?

It's also challenged me to continue to deal with other people that don't look like me. We have to continue to be around people who are different backgrounds. We just can't be comfortable with people who just look like us all the time, you know. We're going to have to get better.

**Kazembe Balagun:** The thing about it was the sense of daring that PTH had was unusual. 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.



*Andres Perez, PTH Civil Rights committee, March on Penn Station during Days of Rage. December 2014*

**Kazembe Balagun:** I think my clearest memory was a talk, it was David Harvey, Monami [Maulik] from DRUM [Desis Rising Up and Moving] and Jean Rice from PTH were all on a panel, and I sat through that motherfucker and my mind was fucking blown and I was like, “What the fuck was that?”

Because they were all brilliant and real smart and really funky and eclectic. And it was also the time I first learned about Right to the City, and I had never heard that concept before.



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

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.



*Ryan Gibbs, PTH Civil Rights Campaign, witnessing passage of Community Safety Act. August 22, 2013*

**Floyd Parks:** It's to let folks *see and know*, take a good look at situations, because they don't know what's going on. They don't involve themselves in that. It's got to be something that's got to be put in their face, something they've got to see, something that they can't just walk around, something they've got to listen to.

You've got to put it in the position that they've got to stop and hear what's going on. They've got to make it interesting, got to make it understandable that this is *a necessity*, somethings got to change.



Floyd Parks, Chyna Burke, Chris Parker, PTH Civil Rights committee filing Notice of Claim against NYPD for property destruction. December 21, 2015

You know, people see good's happening, something good is accomplishing, [imitates voice] "Let me really check this out. Wow, I didn't know they were doing that, like that."

People come up to me and say, "Oh, man! I saw you on TV the other day. I like what you said..." I said, "Wow, what you...

Are you going to help out or what? Are you going to join in?" He said, "Yes, no doubt. How do I do that?" "Go around the corner to 126<sup>th</sup> Street, Picture the Homeless." Yes! I would definitely spread the word. That there's definitely a change out there, and if you want it, it's right around the corner.

**James Doctor:** Honestly, I would say it made me feel good to know that I was giving back and helping, when people helped me out, you know? And then, 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.

James Doctor,  
PTH Civil  
Rights Press  
Conference  
protesting  
NYPD "Move-  
on orders".  
August 18,  
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. And 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, you know, 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. It's a gift. It's 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.



**Jean Rice:** Sister Arvernetta Henry, who's also a Poverty Scholar, Brother Owen Rogers, also a Poverty Scholar, the three of us always represent Picture the Homeless in the Poverty Scholars program at Union Theological Seminary because we realize that in order to gain allies and build a mobilization, it's essential that we have members of the faith-based community. So the Poverty Scholars Program at Union Theological Seminary is a major component in Picture the Homeless building an alliance with the faith-based community.

*Jean Rice, Hector Rivera [Welfare Poets], Arvernetta Henry, on Solidarity March with Coalition for Immokalee Workers with the Poor People's Campaign. April 19, 2010*





**Charmel Lucas:** The outreach at Holy Apostles was very uplifting to show Al and I that we're needed. We could handle it. Because everybody's, "Where's Nik? Where's Nik?" "No, Nik ain't here, it's us." But we'll get it back to him. It was just a good feeling because Nik wasn't there, but they knew they could talk to us, and we'll get it back to Nikita. That was very important.



**Reverend Liz Maxwell:** I thought 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. 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.

I always just really enjoyed the straightforwardness and the quirkiness, in a way, of Picture the Homeless. You know that people were who they were, and the name, Picture the Homeless. It was sort of like. "This is not a program. This is people." And there are a lot of injustices to be addressed, and the people who are the most affected are speaking about what's important to them.

I was always impressed by how many different skills and experiences and backgrounds and articulate, intelligent perspectives there were. So, I just felt like it was a group that really was organizing around basic dignity and rights and the

issues that affected people, and it wasn't always what an agency might think was the most important thing. And it was also very lean, you know. There was not a kind of an overhead structure. It was just the people.



*DeBoRah  
Dickerson,  
U.S. Social  
Forum,  
Detroit,  
2010*

**DeBoRah Dickerson:** We went to the Left Forum, speaking on panels. I loved going to the colleges. We went to colleges, we used to have like a little steady gig, we would go to Hunter College, talking to the students, which was really wonderful. Dr. [Lynn] Roberts, she was really great. We would always go in as a team. I had somebody else to go with me. So, that was important, going and speaking to colleges. I also went one time, spoke at Barnard College, Columbia, and Hunter. We just really had a wonderful time going to the colleges and stuff like that.

**Rob Robinson:** PTH is a place where, I got a foundation of how to organize, right? And then I went to that organizing trainee training, and I think that really helped me. But it also helped me to understand that this problem is bigger than us and people need to be connected. It's, you know, this is not the only place where this is happening. Through Picture the Homeless, I met folks on the West Coast and around the country who were experiencing that, and I think that was huge because the foundations of those connections came through Picture the Homeless.



**Ryan Hickey:** If somebody said something homophobic or whatever we took some space in that meeting to be like, "Okay. Let's examine this. Right? So, why are we like this? Like what does this do to us as a collective group that's trying to form solidarity around this one issue? Like, who is that serving?" Who is this division serving?"

I think allies were really important in that because we built really diverse, strong allies and we went to their actions, we did political work together with CPR and in our housing stuff. It's just it was really, really good for breaking down a lot of stereotypes that people had. But also on their end, too. I mean, I'm sure a lot of the people had stereotypes about homeless people and then working with homeless people they're just like, actually, this is kind of fucked up and they reanalyze what they were thinking.



**Joo-Hyun-Kang:** One of the testaments to Picture the Homeless members humility, was around—I don't know if it was like after the Eric Garner march in Staten Island, or something else. There was something between some of the LGBT organizations, queer and trans organizations and Picture the Homeless, where there was some perception from a few of the queer organizations that Picture the Homeless members had been homophobic at some action.

And I feel like the deep thing to me was that you and whoever else was in conversation with that afterwards was like, "Okay, we'll figure it out." Whereas some of the organizations I love the most, some of the LGBT organizations, were so righteous or self-righteous about their experience or perception of homophobia, that it took some struggle with them to have them also be introspective about how they were dismissive or disrespectful in a relationship to people who are homeless.

My experience with Picture the Homeless members has always been that when something gets brought to their attention in that area, folks are like, immediately reflective, and not defensive.

And that's a real unique trait, and that's something that's developed. I'm not talking about one individual Picture the Homeless member. And it's something that a lot of other groups and folks are not as good at, in terms of being immediately defensive but saying, "Fuck, what did I do? How did that happen? How did that harm somebody? And even if I didn't mean it that way, I shouldn't do it again, and I should know what I did."



**Sam J. Miller:** One thing about organizing is people are at different places, and they might be really smart and powerful about some issues and really get certain issues and have like a really progressive powerful vision of what the realities of an issue are, but then on another issue be terrible, right? And that you might have folks who are really great on talking about racism in America, but then also talk about how, “Immigrants are the problem and immigrants are stealing people's jobs, and that's why we're in the situation that we're in.”

I've always felt like, what happened at Picture the Homeless in terms how queer folks function and are and exist in the space wasn't about me as a staffer being like, “You know you shouldn't do this, or you shouldn't say this homophobic thing.”

It was about queer members *like Bruce*, who were like, “Fuck you, I'm a queer person who's experiencing homelessness and you can be as homophobic as you want to be, but don't say that shit in meetings, and understand that we are fighting for the same thing. And that if we say some homophobic shit in meetings, then we're going to turn away a lot of really smart, powerful people who are going to hear that and be like ‘this is not the organization for me.’” So, I always felt like it was the work of members that sort of like, helped check that.



**Jean Rice:** You can't always wait until it's personal to get involved in the social justice movement. If you want allies in that movement because you know that eventually you're going to need support of more people, you have to be *their* ally in order to gain their allegiance.

But, to take it one step further, there are *so many issues* where there's commonalities between these groups that Picture the Homeless is involved with, or knows of. Where, their struggle might be on a different front, but it is all leading toward the same objective, which is equality before the law. So, it doesn't matter if you're defending the Immokalee Workers who are involved in agriculture and who are laboring to get their bushels of tomatoes they pick—the amount increased by one penny per bushel. That is related to Domestic Workers United's struggle to have themselves included in mainstream Americas workforce.

## RESISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS BUILT DURING DIRECT ACTION

**Jean Rice:** Well I learned about what *needed to be done*—personally, before I joined Picture the Homeless and before Picture the Homeless introduced me to the group known as Domestic Workers United.

My mom had looked forward to when she would become eligible for Social Security, and I remember that tragic day in my moms and my life when I escorted her to the Social Security office, and she was so enthused that now she was going to get her money. And when they informed her that Domestic Workers were not included, so much of the work that

she had done didn't have any value as far as going towards Social Security, or that safety net.

She was so heartbroken. And that was one of the most sorrowful train rides back from Social Security, back to our house. And she was... More than tears, I mean her spirit was broken.

It was so devastating to me, but it never occurred to me that I would get a chance to vindicate her all the way from heaven. So, when I got that opportunity that Picture the Homeless gave me to work with Domestic Workers United, I was so enthused, because here was an opportunity for me to vindicate my late mother and also to make sure that no domestic worker would ever be disenfranchised and marginalized like that again.



*Rev. Liz Theoharis and Jean Rice with Domestic Workers United in support of the passage of the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights. 2007*

**Reverend Liz Theoharis:** Willie Baptist was the coordinator of the Poverty Scholars Program, and he identified an initial list of leaders, from different poor people's organizations from across the country and invited them to become Poverty Scholars.

And so, there were folks from a bunch of poor people's groups in New York City and then they were also people from all over. And many of them had come out of the network that Willie and I had been a part of for many years—welfare rights, organizing, homeless union organizing, low-wage worker organizing.

And so, Jean—but then also Arvernetta Henry and Owen Rogers, were all identified by Willie to be Poverty Scholars. Sometimes it would happen in conversation with the organizations and sometimes it was more individuals. So, in Michigan, for instance, with the Michigan Welfare Rights Union, it was Maureen Taylor and Marion Kramer but then, also this young person, Crystal Bernard, who are all Poverty Scholars.

They would come, and folks would kind of study, and learn, and hang out together, and kind of network. Not in like in a high powered networking way but as in, "Okay, well, we're facing the poisoning of water over here. Where also are people seeing that? What else have we done?" And the whole, you know, "We're having low wage work and we've been kind of winning better wages, but they've been taking away our health care benefits and so, what do we do about that? We're organizing amongst homeless people here."

Definitely folks were *very taken* with presentations that all of those leaders made about the Potter's Field campaign, about some of the civil rights committee of Picture the Homeless and different kind of campaigns that organizations would be



waging, and folks would like learn from those, and in many cases, apply them in their own context. And so, some of that was planned, but a lot of that was just kind of more spontaneous.

And then, because Jean and Mrs. Henry and Rogers were here in New York and because also the Domestic Workers United was here, and the restaurant workers, there was an even tighter cohort of folks in the New York City area.

We'd have Union students go to protests and actions. And then we'd bring people and invite them to come teach different classes at Union, and to take classes. We'd we invite folks to travel on these immersion courses with us. And so, we brought people to West Virginia, and we brought people to the Mississippi Delta, and Jean came on all of these, right? And would play a role as a faculty member! Right?

I mean, he would be one of the teachers of those courses and would both teach about his life experience, his analysis, and the work that Picture the Homeless was doing and how these future ministers all needed to know because they either needed to help start Picture the Homelesses in different places, or need to be aware that their role wasn't to be saviors.



**Liz Theoharis:** Owen Roger's was surely another leader that was a part of the Poverty Scholars program. I think we had started working with Roger's in the Potter's Field campaign, and especially around, gaining access to Hart island and to doing memorial services there. But then also, he would visit congregations with us, and kinds of organizing work, as well as come also to the strategic dialogs.

He would kind of walk people through a process of understanding the kind of conditions that people were experiencing. But again, also seeing the kind of vision and organizing work that people were doing. So not having it end at like, "Look at the situation and like, let's throw up our hands and be overwhelmed by the state of affairs." But instead, kind of rolling up our sleeves and saying, "Yes, we need to know what's going on and this is what we're going to do, and this is how we have been addressing these issues."

And I think Rogers also led delegations of students, both to do kind of some abandoned housing counts, as well as some of the different actions that Picture the Homeless would be doing, including sleep-outs, and other kinds of actions.

I remember, various different students being deeply impacted by getting to be a part of some of that organizing work, you know? Whether it was an action or whether it was research, or whether it was trying to expose to the general public, what's going on and what people are doing about it. He was just always kind of leading people somewhere.





*Rogers speaking and Nikita Price, PTH with Coalition to Save Harlem.*

**Frank Morales:** I'm guessing it was because you guys were doing actions, and you were out there, so I'm sure I just picked up somewhere along the line, that there was an action happening, and I remember being struck by the fact that this was a homeless organization that was beyond service, you know, the offering meals and offering shelter.

That it was an activist social justice-oriented group, and that was unique. Because I think Picture the Homeless was a unique organization among, even Coalition of the Homeless type groups. And I don't put them down, I mean, these were folks who were benevolent people, they're attempting to do what they think is the right thing, providing shelter, and all of that.

But in any case, you know, going at the deeper issues, and organizing for themselves, rather than some kind of top-down thing, or social welfare program, or something like that. It was impressive. So, I'm sure it probably was picking up on some action that was happening—going, “Who are these people?” And just because I was very interested in those issues and so, I just followed up.



*PTH Housing  
Campaign  
Vacant Building  
Takeover.  
March 19,  
2009*

**Anika Paris:** I think it was with through APOC [Anarchist People of Color] that I became aware of a lot that PTH was taking over on like, 115<sup>th</sup> [Street], and Madison [Avenue]. Joe [Jordan] was my friend, I knew Brandon [King] and I think Brandon had posted something to the APOC Listserv about this action to take over the lot.

I went and I was like really sold on the organization after that. It was like, yeah! *There is* all this vacant property and New York has really gone in a direction that's not necessarily surprising but at that time it was nowhere near as bad as it is now in terms of gentrification and just neighborhoods being totally whitewashed, and storefronts being left vacant and then when they finally get occupants it's like a Citibank or something like that.

PTH just really seemed like it was the vanguard of housing and also just the tactics that were being used. I was like, "All right, these are the people who I need to be getting with." And it was fun! I mean people *were* angry, but it felt like a festival, sort of.



*Tim Doody,  
Jean Rice,  
Rev. Frank  
Morales,  
Rachel  
Brumfield,  
Sandra, Maria  
Walles and  
Mike Pacheco  
of the  
Welfare  
Poets, Vacant  
Lot Takeover,  
PTH Housing  
campaign.  
July 23,  
2009*

I think also, knowing about squatters on the Lower East Side it seemed like that was like a bygone era, you know? There were a couple of spaces that were still hanging on. Like, there was C-Squat and I remember people from Books Through Bars and other folks who were around, like [ABC] No Rio, talking about other squatted spaces. But it seemed to me there were these places that had been secured around the time that I was born or, when I was very, very young. But I was in my early twenties and there was a land takeover happening—*like right now* and that was really exciting.



**Shaun Lin:** That action challenged me in ways that I didn't know I was going to be challenged that day. I knew that there was going to be a direct action, and that it was going to be a civil disobedience, and that laws would be broken, quote-unquote. What I didn't expect was to really be challenged on the relationship between real estate and land and speculation and homelessness.

I think from that moment on, I always looked at Picture the Homeless as an organization that was willing to kind of push the envelope in terms of what type of organizing was happening, willing to break the law if it felt it was necessary to do so, and also pushing consciousness.

Like forcing us to think about the political issues of homelessness, not just like we need shelters for homeless folks, but like we need to think about, how we think *about land* in the city. And that was really powerful to me. And so, I was all always reaching out Picture the Homeless organizers in

terms of how to plan actions that kind of got to the root of the problem a little bit more.

It got broken up after a couple hours. I think that the police had kind of rolled in and said that they were going to make arrests... And I think that there was a moment where some people who could not be arrested moved out of the site and then some people decided that it was important to hold the space and to force the police to make the arrests, because that helped to escalate the contradictions. And I always respected the principles from which Picture the Homeless organized. It was very courageous, willing to take risks, *but not* just foolhardy risks. It was risks to raise consciousness. It was risks to force conversation.



*Jean Rice, PTH Housing Campaign Vacant Lot Takeover and CD. July 23, 2009*

**Rob Robinson:** I think it was a dynamic that we put together on the street that day, between both those actions, that garnered us a lot of respect in this city. That's the only way I could say it. I think at places you wouldn't *expect* a grassroots organization to be respected, particularly a homeless organization? We got some pretty high respect from both those actions, right?

And I think members got empowered by that and started to think a little bit differently about a lot of things and so, for me in particular—obviously, I thought a lot about it more, and I said, "This is a way."

I think doing it right and doing it on a moral ground changes the playing field. So to say, "We're taking over the space to give back to the community" has a different ring than Picture the Homeless just taking this shit, right? We've seen banks come in our communities and take from us. Now, it's time to take from the banks and give back to the community.

This is always interesting to me. At a Right to the City meeting at the Urban Justice Center, Micky Melendez—who was running Thompson's campaign for mayor at the time, was at UJC and he looked at me and said, "Ain't you from Picture the Homeless?" And I say, "Yeah." So he pulled me to the side and said, "I want to talk to you. You guys did that action right?" And he introduced himself and said, "I just want to talk to you. I don't want you guys to make some of the same mistakes we did."

And I was like, "Holy—" Right? To have somebody that was a former Young Lord, and nobody had done this type of stuff in twenty or thirty years, it also puts an organization front and center, right? So again, empowering for individuals, empowering for the organization, and it gives you recognition and an importance in the community, right?





**Jean Rice:** On one of many vacant lots that Picture the Homeless had focused on, we made a tent city. I think somewhere in the planning session or maybe during our defense after we got arrested, we found out that JP Morgan Chase owned that property.

And my experience with Picture the Homeless has been ironic. I didn't know the connection, between J.P. Morgan Chase speculating on that site, *and* their antisocial behavior subsidizing in Appalachia, a company called Massey mining. That through the funds provided by J.P. Morgan Chase, they were participating in mountaintop removal in Appalachia that's an ecological disaster.

So! Picture the Homeless and God led me on an immersion trip to Appalachia, where I met this guy named [laughs] Larry Gibson, who I nicknamed the little leprechaun. *But he was a giant in spirit.* He was a holdout. He wouldn't sell his family property in Appalachia to Massey mining so they could use his family property to continue the process of mountaintop removal.

And through that interaction with Picture the Homeless, I was able *to connect* the antisocial conduct of J.P. Morgan Chase on the issue of affordable housing *to* the antisocial social stance with J.P. Morgan Chase providing financial subsidization to Massey Mining—who were polluting the air in Appalachia. So, when Picture the Homeless later, was opposed to J.P. Morgan Chase and Jamie Dimon, when we went in front of his luxurious condominium and protested—it wasn't on a whim! We were protesting antisocial behavior of a major banking institution, J.P. Morgan Chase! The Harriman Family, the Rockefeller family.

This is part of the status quo that determines policy that turns out to be detrimental to the common good. So, through

Picture the Homeless, we were able to introduce Larry Gibson to Reverend Billy! And as a result of that Reverend Billy made a trip to Appalachia where I went to visit Larry Gibson.

But Reverend Billy was more creative than Jean Rice. Reverend Billy came back with some Appalachian soil and went to J.P. Morgan Chase headquarters and threw that soil in the lobby and got arrested. And I'm glad that Lynn Lewis gave me an assignment when Larry Gibson was doing his speech, anti-mountaintop removal speech—at some College in Queens. And I was privileged to take Reverend Billy and *introduce him* to Larry Gibson.



**Frank Morales:** I remember some of the actions that we made. The Long March to Jamie Dimon's house. We had a march to Jamie Dimon, the CEO or whatever of Chase Bank. It was on Park Avenue, I think, and Ninetieth something street. We started at 125<sup>th</sup>, if I recall, and we marched from 125<sup>th</sup> and Lex maybe, down to Park Avenue and Ninetieth Street. It was a bit of a march, because we had a few disabled folk who were with us, or other abled, you know.

It was a *slow* march, but it was a really powerful march. And of course, we had great banners. Seth [Tobocman] and others would help us with the banners.

I remember that as we were crossing we were starting to feel a little fatigued. The weather was okay that day, I remember. But we were, I don't know, we were heading for '90<sup>th</sup> and Park,

and maybe we were on, you know—106 and Lex and we're still making our way there. We were about halfway there, and I was going, "Okay..." And then there were a couple of hills that we had to traverse, and all that, so it was a bit difficult.



*Tammy, Rude Mechanical Orchestra and PTH Housing campaign march on Jamie Dimon's house. March 15, 2010*

But then, we were met by the band, The Rude Mechanical Orchestra. We were coming around the corner, and they started playing. It was so great, I mean, it was such a spirit lifter. And then they joined us, and we made our way to Jamie Dimon's house. And it was impressive. In other words, it was a strong witness to these people who are sitting on so much wealth, and hoarding it, and facilitating the *violence* that's done against people. So, that was a good action.

**Arvernetta Henry:** When this particular party said, “There isn't any vacant property available for the homeless population. That's why you have to be in the shelter system.” Well, she was talking to the wrong group of members!



*Jean Rice, Lynn Lewis, John Jones, GKM, Arvernetta Henry and allies with PTH  
Housing campaign march through New York City Council Speaker Quinn's district.  
April 24, 2010.*

I never thought I would be sleeping out, in the rain, on the ground, on an air mattress, camping out... Because this person owned this building and it had been vacant for many, many, many years, in a very popular district.

And we called the media, we called other organizations that supported us, and I said, "I wanted to do something new." And this was something *exciting* and new to me. I said, "I always liked camping!"



*Andres Perez with his niece, PTH Housing Campaign Sleep-Out. April 24, 2010*

But this was different. This was at night in the city street! I had so much fun, and people came and asked us why we were doing this. We gained *respect* from the people that was in the community. Because they were educated, they found out who owned that building *and they was surprised*. And also, they opened up their stores to us, and they brought us food! Oh my! We had so much food! They allowed us to use their establishment, to go in and wash up, and go to the bathroom.

When they understood why we were out there and realized that, "Well all these people, they are not bad people! They're just asking for housing!" And when we would go to the streets and stay overnight... It brought attention to the main populations to say, "We have to get involved. We may not have to stay overnight, but we're going to support you."

Because of our camping out, other organizations were saying, “How can we do something like this.” We were called in to a couple of meetings and these organizations said, “Tell us how we can do this.” We met downtown with leaders from other places, some wasn't from New York. They didn't know the ins and outs of New York City. However, they felt that they could be some support, and we started this rally called Bloombergville. But Bloombergville had been full force turned into Zuccotti Park, Occupy Wall Street. And people don't realize, it really stemmed from Picture the Homeless.



**Kazembe Balagun:** I also remember PTH being, like at the center of *unpopular struggles*. I remember before there was Occupy, there was just this shantytown, Bloombergville, yeah! I feel like Occupy got all the cred for a variety of reasons. Bloombergville was like pre-Occupy.

Like, there was a vanguardness, they did something that was so advanced, because they saw a need, and they were like, “We have to bring attention to the economic inequality. Let's create this Bloombergville.” And then a few weeks later you see Occupy, right?



**Ryan Hickey:** We had a skit and Scott [Hutchins] was Mr. Podolsky. He dressed up in like this suit kind of thing... Yeah, we had like a little Theater of the Oppressed thing going on, which was really fun. Yeah! Oh man, I would have loved to see the agenda for that day.



*Melinda, Darlene Bryant, Alfonso, Scott Hutchins, Housing Campaign Street Theater and Sleep-out in front of cluster site slumlord Stuard Podolsky. August 2015*

Legal Aid was there. I think UHAB was there. I actually just saw a photo of this recently... Like Carrie White was there from UHAB, I think she was. Legal Aid was there. Banana Kelly was there, Crown Heights Tenants Union. I think that was the majority of the groups. But like Coalition for the Homeless wasn't there and just goes to show like—the organizing that was happening was from Picture the Homeless and no other group... And we were the only ones calling for these demands, in very explicit terms.



**Betty Yu:** We often know what we're fighting against. But then using that 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? 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'd been working with Julian Terrell, with Brotherhood Sister Soul around similar issues around policing, and young folks and sort of more of an abolitionist kind of future, and doing some activities, this series of *Dare to Imagine* workshops. I reached out to you Lynn and others, hoping to work with Picture the Homeless, because it was well-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.

It was an amazing event. There was the sort of soup kitchen style thing outside. It was a little chilly. I think you all were giving out like hot soup and some other snacks. I can't remember exactly, but I remember that being really good.

Some folks made it I think, in their home and then brought it out and shared it.

*Charmel Lucas, Jean Rice, PTH Civil Rights committee with Dare to Imagine action. October 15, 2015*





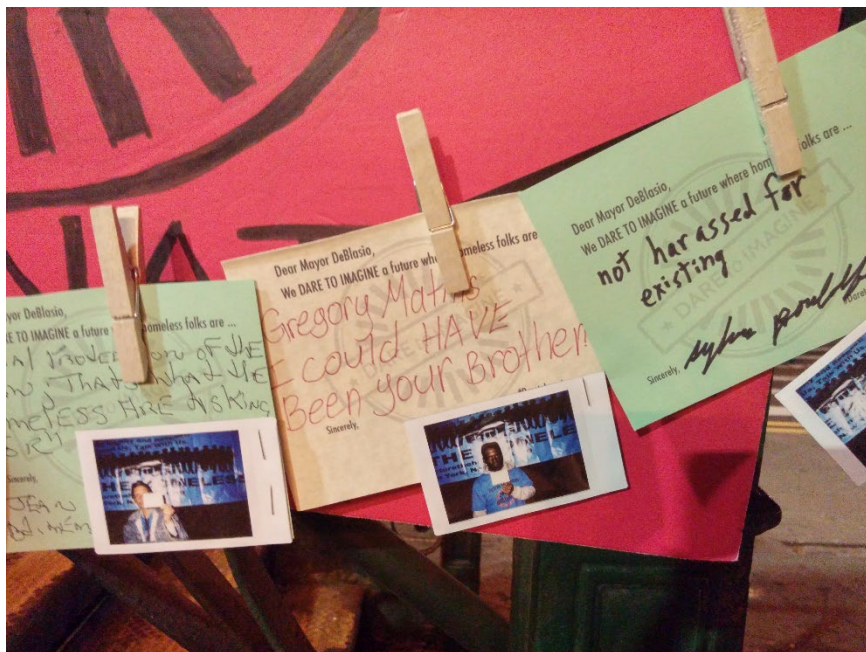
We set the tables that they have there, right? Because it's like a plaza area where it's for the public. But yet when the public uses it, and it's the homeless public, then you get attacked, right? And then you get criminalized and violently taken from the space, right? So it's like, "Yeah! We're the public, we're coming in and we're going to reclaim it!"

So, we had a sound system that was set up and I think we showed a video or did some kind of projection screening. There was a speak out. There was poetry. I remember Marcus also did a reading of some sort, I had just met him a little bit before that, the Homeless Poet, and was like so inspired by his work.



*Marcus Moore, Dare to Imagine. October 15, 2015*

Then the final thing we had was the art making station was where we were taking Polaroids of homeless folks, some who were members and leaders and some who had maybe just encountered the event.



We had someone take a picture and then folks write the message and then we basically put the Polaroid onto the postcard and then the postcards, we displayed them all. We hung them all up so people could see them. The community could see them, the people at the event could see them.

It just reminded me of that, "I'm ready to throw down" collective spirit. That is very rare to really see that in a lot of organizing spaces, right? It reminded me of when a collective is at its best in terms of the principles of it, and on the same page with the mission and everything.



*Dare to Imagine  
with Picture the  
Homeless Civil  
Rights committee.  
October 16,  
2016*

In a four hour compact time, doing what we all did together was symbolic. It wasn't just the event, "Oh. This four hour event." But the symbolism of homeless folks reclaiming, taking that space back.

I just remember the powerful speeches that two or three people made. The folks who were like, "Right here, you know, my cart was taken, ripped from me, my shopping cart." I remember being like, "Wow. That was so full circle powerful." That was just incredible that this person gets to get on the fricken microphone. It's so powerful. It's so powerful. But that was also a fun event, honestly. And it's a testament to you and Picture the Homeless and the commitment and always having the common ground, which I really am inspired by.

That's something I feel like you all, throughout the sleep-outs and all the actions you've done in the past, everything. That's one thing that is so inspiring about Picture the Homeless, really. And not to romanticize, I know everyone's got their shit, everybody, but very inspiring. Literally it's life and death issues that you're dealing with.



*RRR, PTH Civil Rights committee. Dare to Imagine. October 16, 2016*

So, it was really powerful. It was really, really powerful. All of it. All of it. The speak out, the performances, the food, the picture taken with the postcards, I feel like it all went really beautifully.



**Lynn Lewis:** We have all kinds of ways to fight back. But cultural work, is one way and I think that our relationship with you, really helped to reinforce Picture the Homeless's use of seizing space and symbolism and representation and how all those things combine to create a narrative. I think one of the through lines of our relationship with you was, helping us amplify messaging through cultural production.

**Joo-Hyun Kang:** 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, and it's about long-term relationship building.

I feel like Picture the Homeless members have always, at least 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 not as common as we wish it was.



**Jean Rice:** So, when I am honored to be the police negotiator for Picture the Homeless, I try to deescalate the *tension* between the police officers who don't know why we are there or what we are there for, and you give my organization two things—safety and security and time to deliver the message. So far, with the help of Lynn Lewis and Sam, I've been pretty good at that.

So much so, that when we do a coalition action—other organizations have asked me to be part of the planning and

pre-action conference—if I'm not there as the designated police negotiator, to advise the person that *they choose* to do it. And I'm proud of that because, with the exception of one time when *we chose* to get incarcerated and became the infamous Picture the Homeless Eight—other than that, we have a pretty good record of not being abused by the police during that—physically abused during an action.



**Betty Yu:** When Akai Gurley was killed, CAAAV was like the first group in the Asian-American community, particularly in Chinatown, to come forward, and denounce this. It was for CAAAV I think, personally—to have other groups, other Asian American groups like DRUM you know, all the other groups that came out and Picture the Homeless who came out, because the threats were happening.

When folks came, there was like at least eight or nine folks from PTH right? I know folks helped guard one end of the sort of perimeter, I think we made like a semicircle when the press conference was happening.



**Lynn Lewis:** It really speaks to long term relationships where people understand that what they're going through is similar to what someone else is going through and they want to step up.

We had a long time relationship with CAAAV around gentrification and landlords allowing buildings basically to be condemnable and people living in criminal conditions and then the landlords just evicting everyone because the building's going to be condemned. And the real bravery that a lot of Chinatown tenants were showing.

It's not the same exact thing as being homeless, but it's on a spectrum. So for our folks, it was like, "Yeah, these are communities that are facing the housing crisis maybe in a little bit of a different way, but we have the same enemy, you know? It has the same root causes.

So for us, it was very important as an organization to link with CAAAV... Because CAAAV and Picture the Homeless, if I'm not mistaken, are really the two organizations that for years, both organized around housing and to end police brutality. Often a lot of the groups that are organizing around policing don't work on housing in the same way, and vice versa. So for us, we always felt like a special connection with CAAAV.





# International Solidarity and Movement Building

**DeBoRah Dickerson:** Picture the Homeless has been like a core group for me. I have gotten opportunity to not only just talk in New York City, and other cities, and even going into certain countries.

I hadn't been to Canada in years, and it was a caravan of us that went down to Canada, to a women's conference. We had interpreters, and I was just sitting there, and I'm like, "I got to get up and say something." And they were talking about homeless people, and I listened to a woman that was Mohawk, she was representing the Mohawk and the chief, and she was talking about how they were driven off, and then they had a group of people that were in Montreal, and the developers wanted to push them out. And my heart got so heavy.

And then there was someone from Africa, and I was like, "Wow." And Cherokee women were talking about how they was pulled out of their homes and taken into this place and separated from their husbands. A lady talked about cigarette burns on her arm. And I'm like, "Oh my God."

I said, "In New York, in the United States this is what's happening." And I talked about the homeless situation. I said, "We got to come together. I don't care what part of the world, we got to come together. You know, they do it to you, they going to do it to me. So, we need to stand up and fight back, not just come at this meeting and just sit here like, 'Oh, just because we're getting away.' But there are some really global and universal situations that we must come in agreement and solidarity. Because if you don't make enough money, then they can push you out, you know. Or if you don't look like them, they can push you out. Whatever." And it just really, that really got to me.





*Rob Robinson with PTH delegation in Budapest Hungary with A Varos Mendike, Sherwood Forest. August 2009*

**Rob Robinson:** We all have relationships around homeless work, and a dream would be to bring Hungary and Brazil and the U.S. together. You know, WRAP, Picture the Homeless, A Varos Mendike and the National Organization of Street... The first time that that happens on a phone call, I'd be jumping up and down, right? And I just see it building from there.





*Lynn Lewis, Ryan Hickey visiting Caracas, Venezuela at the Latin American gathering of SELVIP. October 2016*

## PTH's MOVEMENT IMPACT

**Nikita Price:** 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.

**Betty Yu:** PTH's work forced everyday people to see homeless people in a very different way, in a very sort of dignified way, commanding and demanding respect and dignity. After the event at the Metro station in that plaza in East Harlem, some of the folks that volunteered or helped that day talked about how impacted they were by that event. That it was just such a unique experience and really demanding that respect and dignity and the way that you all organized together around that is just so powerful and unusual.

It's not just in terms of how it impacts other homeless organizing. I think just other kinds of organizing by directly impacted people, that you all provide that model. Honestly, groups like CAAAV or other groups can learn a lot, from that model of organizing.

That was certainly the most powerful thing, the leadership development and the dignity and respect amongst one another, and the organizing truly, that sort of this bottom up organizing, I think is very inspiring, and powerful.



**Reverend Liz Theoharis:** I remember sitting around in the Poverty Initiative office when we were in this kind of kitchen area, and having Picture the Homeless members there, and some of the faculty and scholars of Union and some of the students and just kind of hearing more and more of the story of Potter's Field.

I remember a Bible professor saying, "I now understand communion. I've studied for years that the early Christian groups, churches, were these kind of burial associations.

They were basically these groups of poor people who vowed to take care of each other when they died because they were living in this kind of empire that was both killing poor people, and degrading their deaths. And that when Jesus says we do this remembrance of me, that's actually about a tradition of poor people memorializing each other."

He was just like, "I've studied this for decades. I'm the expert on this. I go to churches all across the country and world and teach people that what they're doing isn't just about Jesus, but is about poor people organizing. But I never really understood it. I now understand."

And like how that just blows open, what for Christians, who Jesus was and what it is that we do in remembrance of him, right? And so, I just remember this huge kind of ideological impact of this relationship, with Picture the Homeless as an organization and with these individual leaders, you know?



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

I thought that it was really important that people know what your perspective was, what Picture the Homeless, 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.

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. The issues around the RNC affected homeless people in a very particular way, a very critical way. And hearing from you, in a way, gave those of us who were trying to keep programs running, a sense of what made sense and what was really needed. So, it was very valuable in that way.



**Shaun Lin:** I think it must have been either Rob or Jean at that action saying something about what role does land play? Should land serve a social good in terms of housing people, in terms of giving people a safe space? Or should it serve the role of real estate, and be treated as a commodity?

And I think the action of breaking into private property and trespassing on private property and then thinking about what is private property, what is this thing that we're upholding that others would kind of clutch their pearls at, you know—that cutting the locks, going into a vacant lot. And then really thinking through what is land? What is our relationship with land and what is its value? Is its value making money for somebody, or is its value in providing shelter, space, homes for somebody? That I think really like fundamentally kind of made me think about capitalism in a different way.

**Reverend Liz Theoharis:** I remember in particular the first year that the Poverty Initiative had started. We did a couple week immersion course, where we were bringing seminarians and I think a couple of faculty members and others and staff members, to locations—nexus of struggle, and organizing work.

Again, *especially from this perspective* of poor folk leading the way to change. So we brought people to the Picture the Homeless office. I remember, walking up these stairs and, and there was a bunch of folks that were in the space.

I remember for myself feeling just like, really at home. Even though I didn't know all the folks that were present, just because it felt much like the offices of the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization in Detroit, or the Kensington Welfare Rights Union in Philly or the Coalition of Immokalee Workers office, down in southwest Florida.

It was abuzz with different folk that were there—both for community, for solving some immediate problems. But also just because of the camaraderie of trying to build a movement together and trying to like, really advocate for policies and structures that were going to actually, make a difference in people's lives. I remember there were some folks that that had, you know, that had brought their own food. But I also remember us all being offered, you know, water and other snacks and just like a total hospitality that was just, you know, felt immediately.

There were a number of Picture the Homeless leaders that were present, folks that I had known for, for a while. And then there were people that I hadn't met before. And I think what we were doing on that immersion trip and in that particular visit, was introducing people—both to the kind of mission and vision of Picture the Homeless, and also specifically talking

about a couple of the campaigns that Picture the Homeless was working on at the time. You know, a campaign around police accountability, some work that was happening around the rights of canners. And then also the work of the Potters Field. Like it wasn't quite the Potter's Field campaign, but it was folks that were coming together talking about both the reality of life and death for poor and homeless folks, especially through the eyes and experience of Lewis Haggins, the Picture the Homeless co-founder.

There was also some of a presentation. And also, up on the walls a sign with photos from EAU, the Emergency Assistance Unit and the moldy food that people were being fed and the conditions of uncleanness to say the least, that moms and their kids and families were being faced with. You know, here in this in this city that is one of the richest cities in the world, in a homelessness assistance kind of unit, that has at this point a billion dollars a year, right? And yet, the realities of the conditions.

I think we actually brought some students to the EAU when it was out near the old Yankee Stadium, and I remember it having a pretty big impact on a bunch of the students that I had brought. You know, definitely there were quite a few people that really weren't aware of the kind of real life conditions that really millions of people in this country face.

And then there were also folks that had experienced a form of homelessness themselves who then, wanted to talk about, and have a chance to kind of process the power of homeless folk and poor folk organizing.

A number of the folks that that had been seminarians who maybe had experienced homelessness and poverty in pretty extreme forms, hadn't been a part of an organization like Picture the Homeless or a movement like the one we were

trying to build. To see the power of people coming together and not taking the mistreatment and putting forward this vision that it doesn't have to be this way. I remember the impact that it had, from the hospitality to the kind of larger politics, how it all had this like really amazing impact on people, including myself.



**Liz Theoharis:** I do remember Jean Rice would be in these meetings. And he, would draw all of these connections. He would be in a meeting, and he'd be drawing the connection to why he was boycotting Coke for killing revolutionaries in Colombia and other parts of Latin America, and how that same company was kicking the homeless out in Atlanta and how this was a part of a system.

Then, he would draw these connections, both back to the Bible and to these other ideas and to history and then also to our present day and the kind of systems of oppression that were



*John Jones, Jean Rice, PTH Civil Rights retreat. 2009*



impacting his life, but also him showing how they were impacting everybody's lives, and that you weren't free of this. And you know, don't be feeling bad for a homeless person over here because you're just as implicated and you're just as impacted. And just constantly getting people to step back and think bigger.

I mean here was a homeless person who knew so much more about U.S. history, so much more about philosophy, so much more about just any topic than these professors did, than these graduate students did. And that wasn't lost on people. You know, people would be so hungry for that and for the connections that Jean would make.



*Jean Rice, Amy Gopp, William Burnett, PTH Potter's Field campaign visit to Potter's Field. September 20, 2005*

**Liz Theoharis:** It was also I think, a moment where folks in the Poverty Initiative—again, it's *really early on* in the development of what becomes the Poverty Initiative, that then becomes the Kairos Center, which then becomes, this significant Poor People's campaign that's happening all across the country now.

The relationships that people like Amy [Gopp] and other students developed, in developing that liturgy, in getting to go, once you all had won access and doing memorial services. I mean, the number of Union students that got to help lead those, but mostly participate in those, I know played a *huge* role in this kind of next generation of faith leaders. Like being, not just more aware about these issues, but having ritualistic and experience with an interfaith group of people in remembering and honoring.



**Joo-Hyun Kang:** One of the early memories I have around that time was probably you and Jean [Rice] and other folks talking about the history of Picture the Homeless and the fact that Picture the Homeless, in a lot of ways, was founded because of police violence actually, that was regular. And I had known of Picture the Homeless, but I don't think I knew that history, which I felt like was really important to uplift.



**Joo-Hyun Kang:** You were one of the co-chairs of the Policy Working Group for CPR from our very beginning. And I feel like one of the things that helped what is *CPR work* was your willingness to really struggle with people in an authentic way. And I don't think it was an easy group to struggle with, not because people are necessarily deficient and bad, but just because most of us are not practiced at struggling and disagreeing in a principled way with an aim towards not being right, but with an aim towards figuring something out.

I was talking to Loyda [Colon] about this too. I feel like you're one of the people who really practice hope and practice a way of thinking about things as in, *we can do it*. Let's come up with a plan, but we can do it. And I feel like that's one of the gifts you, Lynn, actually brought and Picture the Homeless brought.



**Joo-Hyun Kang:** It was incredibly important for Picture the Homeless to be one of the leaders of the Policy Working Group, and absent that, I don't know that we would have been able to do what we did.

That it's not tokenizing a group to be in a leadership position, it's making sure that leadership positions have folks who are directly impacted, represent directly impacted organizations to really be able to think about how, *especially on legislative issues*, how different legislation will really impact a cross section of organizations.



**Shaun Lin:** I remember the one bill that really resonated with folks was around 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. The inclusion of that language was really important. 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 was important.



**Shaun Lin:** I really loved the mural that we painted in Harlem. I love that because it was such a learning process for all of us. So, 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



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

civil rights in the context of what Michelle Alexander was writing about in *The New Jim Crow*. And 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.

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. And I think that—one, 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 like the final product. They were willing to negotiate and compromise. And so, it was really a community building process.

There's a bunch of Know Your Rights information on the mural. And there was a cop watch team in Harlem that was meeting down the street. So, the mural was not only like, "We're getting together to talk and study and then put up an end product of a mural."

It was also a meeting place and an opportunity to continue to have conversation with folks. You know, even while we were painting the mural, Picture the Homeless members were super active in painting the mural. And also, some members would come and have no interest in painting and just want to talk to people as they're passing by. So, it became a way to just talk to community members about what was happening, too.

The PTH members, I think, really showed up in really powerful ways, both putting in input, putting paint on the wall, and then also just talking to people while we were spending those couple weeks painting.

Jean was very active in the study and the conversations but didn't really necessarily feel like painting was his contribution to it. But he was very present in that project even if he didn't ever put a paintbrush on the wall. Marcus was very active. Ms. Henry was very active. Ryan Gibbs was very active... Althea was always there. I don't think that she was really that interested in painting so much as just kind of being supportive of what was happening... Felipe was there a fair amount... I need to roll by the wall to see who else's names are up there, but those are the names that stand out right now. I know Ryan did a whole lot of painting. Ms. Henry was there very regularly. I think Ms. Henry went to the church across the street too.



**Joo-Hyun Kang:** I also remember early, probably in 2012, there was probably some press thing where I was like, “Do you want to speak?” To you, 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 like 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.



**Willie Baptist:** The idea of Potter's Field and the fact that *the indignities* that homeless folks were facing *alive* was being carried on in death. And the mass graves at Potter's Field here in New York was abominable, and something that needed to be brought out. And plus, one of our founders of Picture the Homeless was buried in Potter's Field.

I remember being among the first after the victory, after the Poverty Initiative helped form the interfaith group. Reverend Amy Gopp played a lead role in that. And I remember after a certain victory that was made, that for a time there, people couldn't go to the island, it's Hart Island. But the agreement was that now people can come visit. And I remember the first visit I was on. I'll never forget that. We was on the boat going to Potter's Field. And I mean, *it was moving* in terms of Picture the Homeless and what it had done, and agitation, and education that it had carried out to bring that about.

I remember taking that story and that whole campaign around the country, and how people responded. I don't care if they're homeless or not. They just responded. And I think today, it's something that we need to have people know about because there's Potter's Fields all over the country.

Every city, there's a situation where people who can't afford to *die*, in the richest country in the world and *you can't afford to die, let alone afford to live*, that they have these Potter's Fields that are set up. I think it's something that needs to be talked about because it's an exposure and *an indictment* on a society that has so much, and yet people die with nothing.



**Kazembe Balagun:** One of the things I remember was also just the militancy. There was a ton of folks that you guys had that were just emissaries to like the broader left community that got around, and it was good. Because then, I feel like folks had a connection and the organization began to be part of the conversations that were crucial.

There was this very anarchistic, very militant, confrontational kind of aesthetic. So, you had APOC. You had Critical Resistance. So things were about busting out and breaking free, and I feel like PTH was a part of that broader milieu. At that time there were different movement spaces around the city. There was 388 Atlantic Avenue, which was a Critical Resistance.



**Kazembe Balagun:** It wasn't like a particular moment where I sat down with people, it was just like a series of encounters with people who I considered very important and people who I considered very serious.

I feel like when I saw Jean I had a similar ah-ha moment when I had with Cornel West, because I feel like Jean was giving life to an intellectual tradition. I don't think I can really describe it, but there's something about a soul force. I'm not actually very religious, but I do believe. And there's something about when you see the spirit of God working in somebody and even if the word Jesus is not even mentioned or God is not mentioned you can recognize that soul and that's what I saw in him.

I think that was something that I really felt, and then knowing Jean, it really got me thinking about like, how I saw the street



again, because then I looked at Pathmark on 125<sup>th</sup> Street, *way different* than when I met Jean.

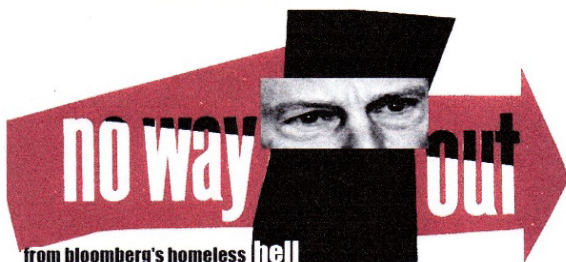
I used to just walk through 125<sup>th</sup> Street and not even think about it. But then when I met Jean, and I heard him talk about canning or bottling and stuff like that... I was like, Pathmark 125! And it shifted the way I thought about the street. Like, I tell people all the time, "You don't need Google glasses if you just listen to people. That's what I felt about Jean.



**Jenny Akchin:** One thing that I do really credit Picture the Homeless with, that I wouldn't have gotten *anywhere else*, is a very healthy critique of vouchers and a very healthy critique of supportive housing.

I really appreciate our members for just their ability to see through bullshit. And this is the new system,

## EMERGENCY MEETING!!



**15,000 formerly-homeless people** have gotten letters from the city, telling them their rent subsidy has been eradicated and **STARTING IN TWO WEEKS** they'll be responsible for paying their entire rent.

**38,000 currently-homeless shelter residents** have been told that the only housing subsidy that could have helped them get out of shelter has been eradicated.

**They won't pay \$1,000 a month for your rent.  
But they'll pay more than \$3,000 a month to lock you up in a shelter?**

Bloomberg and other city officials are putting the blame on the State's decision to withdraw funding for the Advantage program. But the fact is, Advantage has been a terrible program from day one, and homeless people need to force the city to create a real housing solution.

**The time is now. ADD YOUR VOICE TO OURS**

**Shelter residents and Advantage tenants need to come together. Picture the Homeless is hosting an ACTION MEETING TO FIGHT BACK.  
Wednesday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, at 5pm:**

**2427 Morris Avenue/ Bronx NY 10468/  
4 or D train to Fordham**

For more information, contact Sam: [sam@picturethehomeless.org](mailto:sam@picturethehomeless.org)  
or 846-314-6423

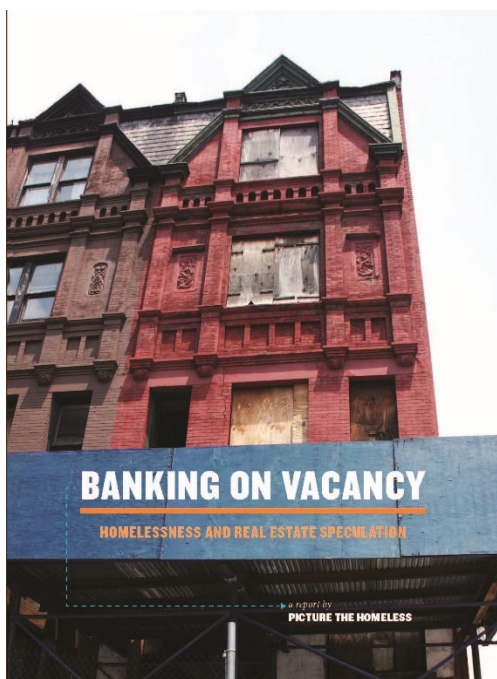


*Flyer from PTH Rental Subsidies Campaign. 2010.*

right? They're going to turn public housing into basically Section 8.

I just really appreciate our members for always being really clear that you can't depend on a voucher, that that's not a reliable source of income for housing, and that without some sort of guarantee, that was going to leave people in the lurch, and leave people shafted.

And I never would have had that level of critique without hearing it from our members and seeing it in our reports. I mean, what is the report called? *Time's Up?*



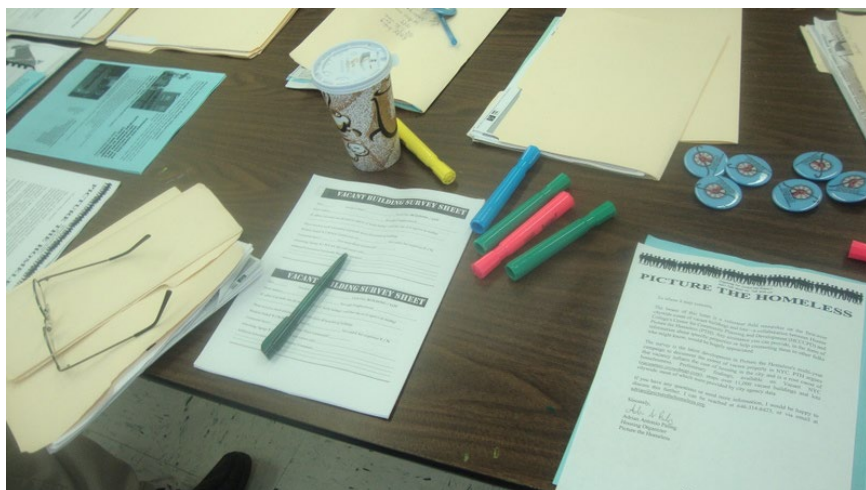
**Jenny Akchin:** Everyone was always talking about Picture the Homeless, talking about *Banking on Vacancy*. But, I don't think that I really had at that point come into contact directly with people from Picture the Homeless or with the organization.

And then I went to this event, and I wish I could remember when it was. But it was about Banking on Vacancy and community land trusts, and I have my notes from

it. It's like, I was looking at it the other day, and I was like—mutual housing associations! Like wow. They were talking about that then, too!

I mean, Picture the Homeless was like they're in their own category. It was just like, "This is an organization that's super-down, that does direct action, that is in all the movement spaces and engages in this radical way." And maybe I'm just projecting my current experience on what I knew about Picture the Homeless at the time.

But I do remember people would talk about Banking on Vacancy and how amazing it was. Like, just that people went and just counted, right? And just did it, because people talk all the time about data, right? And like, "Oh, we need to get this data. Oh, we need to get that data." And like, yeah, you all just did that! You know? And I think that was really attractive to me at the time, because it was... Seeing groups that actually *do* and show up in that way was like really, really cool.



*PTH Housing Campaign Vacant Property Count Training Packet*

**Kazembe Balagun:** Pointing at the vacant houses that exist in the city, is the most intrinsic critique of capitalism that you can do without even telling people that, “This shit’s about capitalism.” That shit is so slick and so smart that people don’t understand they’re talking about capitalism, because it’s like, “Yeah! Look at all of us homeless people and look at all those empty houses. You make that connection.” And folks are like, “Damn!”

I think that’s the thing for me, that was the pedagogical example of people’s actual practical lived experience *being dignified and not theorized*. And just being able to point that out to people, was something where I thought that that movement pedagogy felt like *it was real*.

And I also felt it was real in terms of the symbolism. I felt having the powder blue shirts and the crow bar as a symbol was this kind of level of visibility around the issue that was just like, yeah!

You know, like we’re pushing the levers of this work. The imaginary was important in terms of using that language, but also symbols, and so then that was what connected us, and then what ends up happening is that people who you have no contact with, kind of just *get it*, and there’s no requirement to understanding the work between left and right.



**Kazembe Balagun:** I think that one of the things I really appreciate about Picture the Homeless was the intellectual rigor, and like the fact that you all would like, publish reports, and did a lot of that work. And I think that’s something that was really interesting to me. It seemed to work so seamlessly and endlessly and so effortlessly with the broader left,

intellectual community and really not just held its own but actually created that space for intellectual work to be happening in the city.

You know, I feel like right now we're just a lot of popularization around Right to the City, like cooperativism, inviting different schema, and you know, PTH's intellectual interventions in a lot of ways, kind of pushed those doors open. And it was done in a way that was in co-leadership with folks like Harvey, and some other of the think tanks or whatever around the city. And so, like for me, that was something I recognized as something that was really important.



**Kazembe Balagun:** Homelessness is a manifestation of the deep, deep, deep inequalities of capitalism. And I felt like Picture the Homeless put that on the map. It was a media savvy organization that was able to do grassroots organizing work at the same time. Like, leverage and put pressure on elected officials in really serious ways. And I think that strategy is something that's taken on today in a lot of ways, by a lot of different groups.



**Jenny Akchin:** I think there were two main categories of things that were priorities for our members that felt really important to bring into the space and one of them was, how are we pushing the city to use its underutilized and vacant property for deeply affordable housing? And then the other was, how do we make sure that, once we get all this vacant and underutilized housing on a community land trust, that it actually will be affordable?

And the second one I think, was like the much, much harder thing to talk about, because it's really hard to do in the market that we're in. And so, that was always the question that sort of lingered at the end of everything.

But having Picture the Homeless represented in that space was really important because it is really easy to get lost in policy stuff like tax exemptions and special legislation and definitions and things that matter a lot, but when it comes down to it, don't matter as much as how are we going to stay accountable to the people who have been pushing for these policies to come about and make sure that, at the end of the day, this project supports those people and people who are in the same position.

That was always a big push, trying to think about *who* these buildings were going to serve and *who* these land trusts were going to serve and so... I guess that was Picture the Homeless' role in that space.



**Ryan Hickey:** I remember we formed a CLT study group, where we didn't learn about CLTs *solely*, we learned about all of this really boring ass complicated language that is used to put people in their place, to make people feel stupid. It's a *tool* to oppress people and to marginalize them from other conversations. Like, these complicated financial terms, "equity", whatever...

We developed a curricula based on brainstorming sessions. I was extracting themes that were coming out of housing meetings—where like a Kendall or an Arvernetta said a term, and I saw everybody's face go blank. I was like, "Okay, we need to go more into that, but the housing meeting isn't the place to do it, so we need a separate space to do it."

So, Deshonay and Hillary helped with the curricula, and we had weekly study groups where we were talking about community land trusts, really getting into the nuts and bolts, looking at case studies, we were reading reports. We

were having reading groups and we played a lot of games. And that's when John Krinsky came with his Lego set and everybody was obsessed with John Krinsky and his Legos because people learned so quickly from that kind of stuff. And that's where I really like latched on to popular education. I was like, "Oh my God. This stuff is so good, and I loved doing it and it's so powerful and I see the results."



*PTH Housing Campaign game, Trustville. 2015*

We educated ourselves based on the knowledge that we already had but we also looked at other resources, as well. We tapped into those resources, and we started forming this common language around land trusts and mutual housing associations and home ownership and equity, all this really complicated terminology that was used to *other* homeless people in these conversations, in these policy questions.

And I think people just made a conscious decision. We're just like, "No, that's not going to happen anymore. You know, we're going to be part of these conversations. We're going to be *leading* these conversations."

That's when NYCCLI was really taking root and that's when the study group morphed into the Education and Outreach Workgroup, where the coalition was looking to Picture the Homeless to like ingest the material and digest it and see what comes out in terms of how do we talk to people about this really complicated stuff.



**James Tracy:** What I noticed as Picture the Homeless interacted with different formations in New York, political formations, is that even with really, really enlightened people who care really deeply about social justice and a better world that the idea of homeless people being in an organization and doing it for themselves and being fierce and strong can still be a little bit *surprising* for them.

Ultimately, most of them welcomed it, but at first, they were like, "Oh, wow! These people can speak for themselves." I think



that that's one of the things about Picture the Homeless, the smaller impacts that are still really profound.

I remember marching alongside the immigrant rights group with you guys, and you could tell that they weren't used to working with homeless people or marching along with homeless people, but once people got over the initial cognitive dissonance about what they thought was possible, often times it was very welcomed. So, making that space for homeless people to be part of a movement was something that was *really evident* out there.

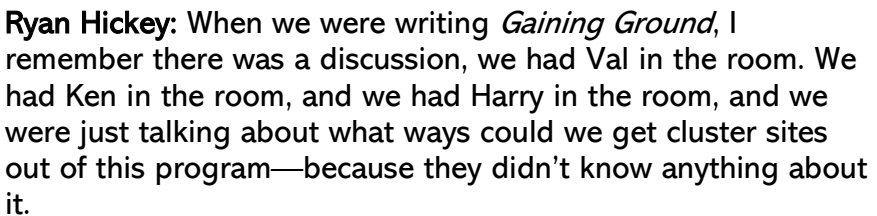
I think there was that coalition called *Still We Rise* that you guys were a part of and there was all sorts of discussions and tensions and stuff, but just the fact that Picture the Homeless has made that space, I'm sure it's never easy, but the fact is that a lot more people just accept as fact the possibility of homeless people to be their own protagonist in their own story is an impact.



**Jenny Akchin:** *Gaining Ground* was like us giving the city all of its best ideas, right? It was homeless people looking at these buildings that were rent-stabilized, where slum lords like the Podolskys, had kicked people out and replaced their rent-stabilized homes with shelter units.

idea was, this is a huge waste of housing for everybody because it's just a displacement machine where people are displaced into homelessness, and then homeless people are put into the same homes that those people used to live in and then the slum lords collect twice as much rent, and it's just a shitty system.

*PTH Housing Campaign  
Gaining Ground roll-out.  
January 27, 2016*



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of them were like, “Good luck. It’s not something that really people organize for, or ask for.” But all the members were just like, “No, we have to. Take these buildings away from these assholes. We have to. Like there’s no other way.”



**Jenny Akchin:** And then, it goes into a vacuum, and then we get a call scheduling a meeting with the deputy mayor, Alicia Glen, who we all have feelings about, but who actually really I think read this report. And I remember her staff was like, “This is interesting, right? This is a good report.” And you know, then it goes into a vacuum again and a couple of months later they announce their amazing plan to take these buildings through eminent domain!

And I mean, I know our big victory that year was the Housing Not Warehousing Act and that was twelve years of work, and it was amazing. But, that was a victory. *That’s huge.*

That little policy report went in three years, from a bunch of notes on a Google spreadsheet to a portfolio of buildings being transferred and they’re going to be developed next year.





## City Agrees To Buy 'Cluster Site' Units For \$173 Million, In A Windfall For Homeless Families And A Notorious Landlord



**Ryan Hickey:** I said to the mayor, “You wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for these two people, Lisa, and Charmel. Like, you wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for us because I don’t know if you know but we’re the ones who put this plan in motion. We’re the ones who gave you the statistics. We’re the ones who gave you the facts. We’re the ones who gave you the framework to work with and then you’re just ignoring homeless peoples’ work.” Which the city often does and always does and probably—hopefully they won’t continue to do that. But yeah. And then, turns out eminent domain wasn’t such a bad idea after all, and the city really liked it and that was because of us. *For the record that was because of us.*



**Joo-Hyun Kang:** Remember in 2014, the MTA 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], it 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 don't remember when, but it was definitely in the morning. But I think some of it was a good learning for me around how to publicly frame the issues around it. And I think 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.



*Majesty and allies with PTH Civil Rights Emergency Rally at One Police Plaza to stop illegal removal of homeless New Yorkers from the E train. February 2014*

**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.

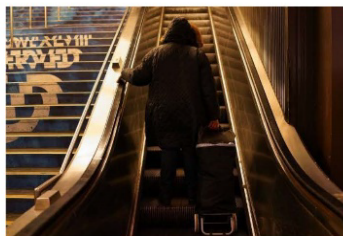
So, we organized a bunch of cop watch at the end of train lines that we thought would be over policed, and then also passing out information about what people's legal rights are on the

trains, and also did a bunch of media stuff too that kind of publicly brought attention to the fact that the police were doing this in ways that I think— they ended up calling off that, right, that they ended up not arresting people off the train.

## 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.

2427 Morris Ave,  
Bronx NY 10468

Phone 848-314-6423 Fax 848-314-6429

[info@picturethehomeless.org](mailto:info@picturethehomeless.org)

**Joo-Hyun Kang:** One, that 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. And two, that that legislation is in some ways really challenging because, not only because of lack of some data that we have to try to get, but also because the options through legislation don’t necessarily fully solve the problem.

And that’s true of any legislation. But, in this case, I feel like in some ways it’s *more true* because there’s the possibility of up-charging. There’s other tactics that the police can use even once the legislation gets passed, that they can use the next day. So, I think some of it is also really reaffirming the need to continue organizing and community education and thinking about what the organizing possibilities are to end or reduce a problem with one tool being legislation, but legislation only being a tool in that.

**Lynn Lewis:** We learned a lot, the example of up-charging, for one. For Picture the Homeless members it was important to go *directly* to diminish the power of the police being able to arrest them. Unlike the profiling bill, which, if you’re rights are violated, then you have to bring a suit, this folks were excited about because it was going to say

**Kang:** Take a tool away, yeah.

**Lewis:** “no, police officer, you cannot arrest me for this anymore.” And then, like with every victory, there’s new problems. And we learned what some of those new problems might be.



**Shaun Lin:** We worked really closely with Justice Committee and Bronx Defenders in the Bronx, like uptown and in the Bronx around some of our policing stuff. We always had really great ally support from a couple organizations.

CAAAV is I think one of those organizations that would come out and support Picture the Homeless actions. CAAAV members were definitely present during those late night, Copwatch type patrols on the trains, and I think city-wide there was—back then, a much more active network of people doing cop watch related to People's Justice, and that they were really active in coming out to support Picture the Homeless stuff.

There was also organizations that I think were left of Communities united for Police Reform but that maybe were critical of the citywide campaign, but that still had a lot of respect for Picture the Homeless work. So that they would come out and support our work, even if they didn't necessarily love CPR work.



*Duwon Bryant, Jean Rice, and John Jones, PTH Civil Rights End Disorderly Conduct Campaign. June 15, 2010*



THE BRONX IT'S TIME FOR US ALL TO  
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**FREE HANDS-ON TRAINING TO  
LEARN HOW TO MONITOR AND DOCUMENT THE  
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LEARN YOUR RIGHTS, EDUCATE YOUR COMMUNITY,  
CONDUCT COP WATCH & DETER POLICE ABUSE!**

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6:30-8:30 pm**

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**4/D to 161st-Yankee Stadium**

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Accountability,  
a coalition of:**

**CAAAY**  
ORGANIZING ASIAN COMMUNITIES



**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. Picture the Homeless members took on a lot of leadership in organizing that stuff. Marcus, Kendall, and Jean, I think in particular would be regular at those meetings. It was really important to them to support the family members of people who were killed by police. So, 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*. So we made sure that happened. 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.

But just really trying to be present about 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 a/ways*—bringing in their analysis into a space and leaving a real impact on that space, and on that organizing.



**Kazembe Balagun:** PTH's ability *to win* at the vacancy count also opened up the space for people to talk about community land trusts because then people were like, "You know what? There's a lot of land in New York City."

That seed that I think PTH has created has also been able to expand itself into this kind of network of ideas and network of sensibility that can really build out from underneath it, you know? That's why I think that building these networks are going to be crucial. That's the dreams that I think people are having right now. They're like, "Oh, this is really possible. These are real tools. We can do this." You know?



**Dave Powell:** Picture the Homeless is the reason, as far as I'm concerned, unambiguously *the reason* why our little example [Cooper Square CLT] has become a city-wide movement.

I think PTH is unambiguously *the reason* why this thing grew from the little unicorn in the corner that HPD and others encouraged the rest of the city, and every other neighborhood, *not to look at*. Because it's just like, "We don't want to do that again! We don't want to give up that much again. We don't want people to know that that's possible." PTH is the reason why that scaled up, right?

It was also very much that PTH was dealing with successive city administrations, that were hostile to actually building and preserving and *doing anything* in terms of housing, for low-income people, and for homeless people or formerly homeless people.

The area median income levels that were being targeted, throughout the '90s and through the zeros and, then into the teens these were not low income apartments.

The city had made basically, its de facto policy that it was going to build middle-income and even, to some degree, I would consider, housing for wealthy people, and it was going to subsidize that. But it wasn't really interested in housing homeless people, or formerly homeless people, or preserving low-income communities in any meaningful way. I mean homeless people were left out of successive so-called affordable housing plans.

It's Picture the Homeless that we have to thank for really driving home the phrase "affordable to whom?" Affordable to whom? Because affordability, it turns out, is a relative term, right? We should all know that. But the city had us a little tricked. The city had us a little bit—accepting. That even though it's called affordable housing, "Yeah, you know, really low income people are actually going to be left out of that." And that made no sense at all and continues to make no sense, you know?

Picture the Homeless held successive mayors accountable for that phrase—or at least wouldn't let them off the hook for it. "Affordable to whom? Who are you talking about? Who are you talking for? Who do you think you're housing? I can't get into that housing. Bullshit-bullshit-bullshit."

You know, calling them out! That's important, you know? That was super important! And then, half the—or more than half, of the affordable housing world is running scared because they know that these policies are inhumane. But they don't want to say anything, because they don't want their funding cut. They want to build whatever they can build, right? So they're not going to say anything. So, it was up to PTH to step out and call them out and PTH did that.

And then the other thing I did want to say, the reason that HPD *ever changed their mind*, is because PTH would not let successive administrations off the hook—and pointing out that this housing was for essentially middle-income people, and was not doing anything to abate homelessness, right?

And the entire reason that HPD and the City Council have funded this [CLT's] is PTH. PTH is the reason for the season, you know? That's the only reason we're here, folks. I'll tell anybody that at a NYCCLI meeting. I'll tell anybody that at the City Council hearing. I'll tell anybody that who'll listen.



**Lynn Lewis:** What was the engagement like working with Picture the Homeless around Potter's Field and getting Lewis [Haggins]?

**Reverend Liz Maxwell:** Well, this was a big education because I had never thought about it before really, And it was very moving to me how determined and persistent people were and that kind of convinced me that it was something we really had to do, that it was the right thing to do. And that it wasn't just about Lewis really, that there were lots and lots of people for whom this was an issue.

And I learned a bunch of stuff that I'd never known about before. But I think the other thing was the feeling of—that there was a lot of clarity about how to kind of keep moving, even through all the road blocks and the times when it just didn't seem possible that we were going to be able to get out there, you know?

I remember getting the bishop and the archdeacon involved, and they saw that it was the right thing to do. I mean, obviously giving somebody a proper burial is a religious function! So, the faith leaders got interested in that. And then it became eventually clear that there was a much longer history about people not being able to get to Potter's Field, when they had loved ones who were buried there. And that was clearly wrong, but it took a while to move. And then the whole relationship with the Department of Corrections and the prisoners who were used to dig the graves and that kind of stuff—which was like, *what?* Which, I had no idea.

I remember finding my way to East Harlem and by that time I knew some of the people of Picture the Homeless, and I sort of knew what we were trying to do. And sometimes it was a bit tedious. It would go on, you know—everybody being heard, which was important but took a long time. I just remember that it was part of the process. It was a journey. A long journey, as I recall. And we met all kinds of people who knew about things about it that I hadn't known.



**Lynn Lewis:** You know, it was a journey—the Potter's Field work, and we built really powerful relationships with faith communities. And in some cases it transferred over into our housing campaign work, much less in our anti-police brutality work. What are some things that Picture the Homeless did that allowed that engagement to happen, in your point of view?

**Reverend Liz Maxwell:** Well, I think for me it was that there were people who would listen, who had a really compelling story to tell but also could be involved in a give and take about how to try to engage the issues. And of course the Potter's Field thing, you know, we worked on it for a long enough time that we knew and trusted each other. At least just to a large extent, I think. But I think a lot of it was just attention to trying to build relationships.

I think it also drew on the faith traditions of the homeless folk, you know? My experience at Holy Apostles was that many of the people who ate at the soup kitchen were deeply religious and came out of religious backgrounds, not exactly our religious background but nevertheless, they were Christian, and they sort of understood stuff in a religious way. They viewed the world in a religious way.

And I think that this was one of the places where you could really see that. You know that human dignity and a sense of what it is to be a human being and what God would want. You know, the homeless folks could talk about that just as clearly as the faith leaders could, in many cases.





*Above, Darlene Bryant, PTH Housing Campaign prop making at Holy Apostles Church for vacant property tour. August 24, 2010.*

*Below, one of the stops on the vacant property tour.*





**Reverend Liz Theocharis:** We came together to kind of form this Poverty Scholars program. The idea behind it was identifying leaders from different organizations, or folks that were trying to form, and start their own organizations of poor and homeless and low-income folk, who were, on the front lines of pushing back against, and fighting racism and poverty and low wages and you know, the lack of health care and a lot of different manifestations of ways that that poverty impacts people.



**Paul Boden:** I think that there are a thousand homeless coalitions: Picture the Homeless, LA CAN—there are a thousand of them out there, at various stages. And I think our responsibility to create a national vibe, a national energy that can give those groups some fucking way to connect, is fucking vital. But they're there! I know they're there. Because we're not anomalies. We're just fucking lucky enough to have gotten some shit together, and staying together.

I think that that's the main gist of what we need to do to get this national shit thing is, and it's corny but if anybody thinks they have all the answers individually, they're out of their fucking mind and they shouldn't be allowed to be a part of this organizing campaign. If everyone doesn't come to the table that, "I'm going to learn some shit from you and I'm going to teach you some shit, and that's how we're going to build a national organizing network."



**Willie Baptist:** So the homeless organizing is beginning to return, in a major way, and also poor organizing connected to that, which the homeless as poor are part of it. But you can't have poor organizing in this country without homeless organizing, because that's at the forefront. So, you have this rekindling of an organizing drive just because the situation is becoming much more *excruciating*. You have SEIU trade union organizers who are living in their cars! Huh? You know? I mean, this is the predicament. So this is not a charity issue. This is an issue of justice.



## MOVEMENT BUILDING AND FUN

**Betty Yu:** I have to say that there is *no other group* that really throws a party like you all did, and maybe continue to do. *But you all threw down*. It was incredible. The amount of detail, also that you paid attention to, A. And then B, just having the fun, the spirit is definitely like no other, like for real.

When I would go to a PTH party, I knew it was going to be so much fun. I always knew that I was gonna stay till the end. I always knew I was going to sweat and probably lose a pound or two pounds from dancing and sweating. And I knew there would be food and fun and good people, good company. I remember the music being amazing. That's one thing I remember that the music was amazing and the company obviously, and the space itself being amazing.

**Anika Paris:** I do remember the parties. I think that is definitely something I want to talk about as like a final thought but also what I learned from PTH. So, the parties were like really good, I mean, definitely just the importance of *having fun* with the people that you're like organizing with, having fun. Yeah, the importance of fun.

There would be these regular house party fundraisers. A lot of times they would be at the office and there would always be food, there would always be beer, there would always be really good music. I remember those parties being really fun.

I don't know, remembering all this stuff fondly. But we did get on each other's nerves, you know? There *would be* people butting heads, in the office, in the organization. And I think in addition to being fundraisers—fun fundraisers, yes... The parties were also just really serious community building and incentive to stay involved, to like keep coming back.

**Lynn Lewis:** The parties were fun, and I think it was also a big political move to create a space where folks were having fun with homeless folks.

**Lewis:** They would not be the people you would think of, "Oh, let me go hang out with this guy at the end of the train, stretched out on the seat. But here you are, dancing with them or they're deejaying, or whatever and you're having a great time. And it was important for members being somewhere where they could be themselves and not be controlled. Like, of course there would have to be some social norms, as there always are but that are collectively agreed upon. And that you could just cut loose and talk shit.

**Lewis:** The segue from sleeping on the street in a protest or to having a party

**Paris:** was sometimes kind of seamless.

**Lynn Roberts:** Joy is part of movement building that people kind of forget about. Because if we don't have that, I don't think we'd be bonding quite the same way... If we're only coming together to say, "Well, that's not going well. What's not right. What's wrong?" And I always felt elevated by that.



**Joo-Hyun Kang:** I feel like one of the things I appreciate most about Picture the Homeless members is that they have understood the importance of celebration and taking stock, and appreciating—each other, themselves. And that's part of the kind of culture of joy we need to cultivate, because this is all hard work. It's traumatic work, and it goes back to what you said earlier. If we don't build out these relationships, I mean, building out deep relationships is part of what most of us work for, with trust.

And that's probably one of the lessons from the Coalition Against Police Brutality days. It's like, many of the reps from Coalition Against Police Brutality or their organizations who were amongst the founding members of what became CPR, I feel like to this day folks—there's a level of trust because people *did work together*.

It's not a level of trust because they were in meetings together. It's because people did work together. They cried together. They celebrated together, and learned together, and that those relationships in a lot of ways, they're some of the invisible glue that helps CPR actually keep moving.



*PTH 10th Anniversary Gala, November 2009*



# ORGANIZING LESSONS LEARNED

- Don't let anyone tell you "it can't be done"
- Be clear about your mission and values
- Look for allies that share your mission and your values
- Homeless folks representing Picture the Homeless was the most direct way to defeat negative stereotypes about homeless folks and build relationships
- Bold direct action not only builds leadership within the group it also energizes and inspires allies and movements
- To gain allies you must be an ally [Jean Rice]
- Homelessness is intersectional, your allies should reflect those intersections
- The more members representing the group the more allies you can build because each member has their own skills, interests, and capacity to engage others
- Resistance relationships happens in and outside of meetings. For folks to have your back you need deep relationships formed during meetings, actions, knowledge sharing, laughter, commitment, and joy
- Be bold and daring but back up your analysis with documentation and research
- Use visual symbols to communicate what you're about, not only speeches

## Narrators:

Anika Paris	Anthony Williams	Arvernetta Henry
Betty Yu	Brooke Lehman	Charmel Lucas
Chino Garcia	Dave Powell	DeBoRah Dickerson
Floyd Parks	Frank Morales	James Doctor
James Tracy	Jean Rice	Jenny Akchin
Joo-Hyun Kang	Kazembe Balagun	Lynn Lewis
Lynn Roberts	Marcus Moore	Maria Walles
Nikita Price	Paul Boden	Rev. Liz Maxwell
Rev. Liz Theoharis	Rob Robinson	Rogers
Ryan Hickey	Sam J. Miller	Shaun Lin
Sue Lob	Willie Baptist	



Picture the Homeless is one of a new-old breed of community organizations, a breed that almost seemed somnolescent in recent years, organizations that dealt with basic problems of human rights in a militant, strategic, researched, and planned way, run not by some outside funder or established NGO but by the people directly affected themselves.” ~ Peter Marcuse

## 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**  
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