



STREET SPIRIT

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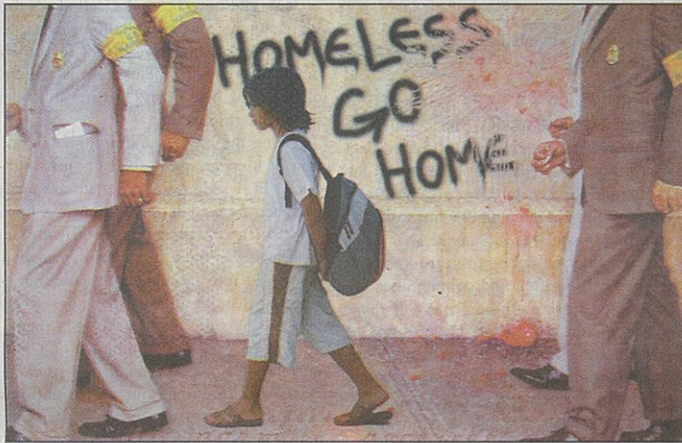
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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Hobos to Street People

Artists' Responses to Homelessness from the New Deal to the Present



"Homeless Go Home" [Segregation, After Norman Rockwell] Art by Nili Yosha

by Carol Harvey

Terry "Tresa" Chandler stood in the vaulted art gallery. Her tiny 4-foot-11-inch figure was dwarfed by the colorful painting of a Latino child walking to school past a rotten tomato splashed against graffiti on a wall, ordering "Homeless Go Home."

The child is protected by four adults as he walks to a school for homeless children. Artist Nili Yosha crafted the work after Norman Rockwell's illustration of guards escorting a small black girl into a newly integrated Little Rock school in the civil rights era.

Chandler tilted her head, peering at me with a shy, sardonic smile. "When people say this," she observed, "they are doing it to be mean. It's good that homeless people get to see (this show) too. Then we can tell you if it's real or not. The best thing about this show is it makes people think." Chandler's voice echoed slightly, "I live it. It's so real. All this is so true."

I invited four formerly or presently unsheltered San Franciscans to The California Historical Society at 678 Mission Street in San Francisco. They viewed a collection of paintings, prints, photographs, and mixed media pieces by more than 40 artists in an exhibition entitled "Hobos to Street People: Artists' Responses to Homelessness from the New Deal to the Present."

The show began on February 19 and continues to August 15, 2009. It was organized by curator Art Hazelwood, a San Francisco artist whose artworks on homelessness and social justice are often published by *Street Spirit*, and the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP).

Charming, well-spoken Chandler, 27, once slept in nearby Annie Alley next to a dumpster pictured in an exhibit photo. After one night on the street restlessly avoiding dangerous biting rats, Eric Robinson, 54, stays in shelters or with

friends. David Suttles, 56, camped in the street with his wife after being evicted by a corrupt hotel management. Travis, 28, read John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* just before he was forced to leave home.

Curator Art Hazelwood reported many positive reactions to the show, and favorable media coverage. Visitors' occasional negative responses reflect a "demonization" of homeless people by the press and social stereotyping, according to Hazelwood. "People want to turn homeless people into a kind of Other that they can dismiss," he said. "It's easier to dismiss people if you categorize them and accuse them of being morally lax."

Chandler agreed. Her brown bangs swung adamantly. "The newspaper tells people things that aren't true, and people believe it."

This false stereotype "is not something new," Hazelwood said. "One answer to almost any complaint is to point to identical patterns of condemnation throughout our history." The cheap fix of Mayor Gavin Newsom's Care Not Cash program that slashed lifeline benefits to homeless people and Rudy Giuliani's attempt to sweep away New York's homeless like broken glass are paralleled by 19th century social workers who concluded poor people were lazy, defective degenerates who needed rehabilitation by learning the value of work, and sent them to forced labor workhouses "breaking rocks."

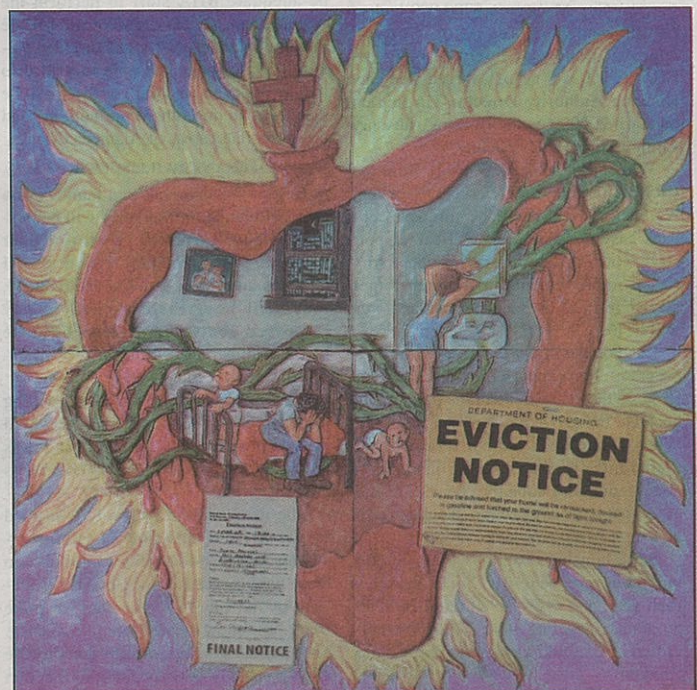
Doug Minkler, an artist who sells his art on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, has a close connection with street life. Eric Robinson was drawn by its color and dynamism to Minkler's painting "Who Drives The Cycle of Poverty."

Bill Clinton dismantled welfare in 1996, calling it "reform," but "doing a lot more damage than any Republican," said Minkler. "The National Lawyer's Guild,



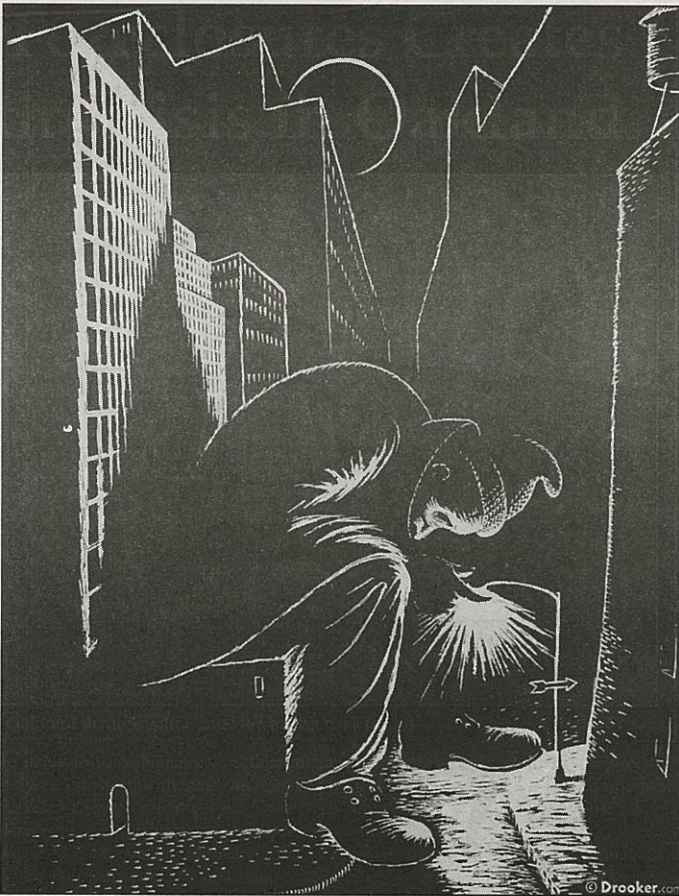
"Under Bridges"

Painting by Eric Drooker



"Sacred Heart"

Jos Sances, ceramic tile



"Homeless Giant"

Art by Eric Drooker

Hobos to Street People

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seeing this as a real attack on women, (and) the poor, hired me to do a piece on the concept."

Hazelwood chose Minkler's painting for the show because it satirizes the Perpetual Poverty "Cycle," the studded tires of a motorcycle gunned toward us by a vicious boar. For its very existence, our capitalist republic seems to require, at varying levels of intensity, poverty's perpetual presence, cycling endlessly round.

Out of the motorcycle's exhaust pours poisonous gas — welfare cuts, layoffs, unemployment, homelessness. "Who drives this cycle?" Minkler asks. "Welfare Queens? Illegal Aliens? Bleeding heart liberals?" Then he gives the answer: "Capitalist Pigs." "Crash the Cycle of Poverty!" or it will drive on and on, carrying the hog to hell.

Hazelwood is himself a San Francisco artist whose etching-style linocuts have enlivened the pages of San Francisco's *Street Sheet* and the East Bay's *Street Spirit* newspapers since 1994.

A year and a half before the economy plunged and the banking crisis caused home foreclosures, mass evictions, and a surge in homelessness, Hazelwood planned a commemoration of the New Deal's 75th anniversary.

During talks with the Western Regional Advocacy Project's Paul Boden and Berkeley professor Dr. Gray Brechin, an expert on the New Deal, about parallels between the Depression era and today, it struck Hazelwood that a show comparing homelessness in the 1930s with contemporary homelessness was a brilliant way to make it all clear to people. "We've been through this before," he said. "We can get through it again. If we try, we can do something to (solve) this problem."

The show's sections focus on four aspects of homelessness:

1. The *daily realities* of life on the road or on the street, without housing.
2. The *displacement, rootlessness and*

vulnerability that are part of the homeless condition, and also, the deeper underlying sense of disconnectedness endemic to American culture, housed or homeless.

3. A look at *urban vs. rural poverty*, realizing that homelessness in the country is often unseen and unrecognized.

4. *Struggle and hope* "that we can change things."

DAILY REALITIES

The show contrasts today's homelessness with the Depression era and challenges our narrow range of homeless stereotypes. Homeless people are many and varied. People may live in cars, or in the country. Many hold down jobs, or work hard at recycling. They may live in dangerous shelters — or refuse to live in them, in preference for the street.

In Christine Hanlon's contemporary oil painting, "Third Street Corridor," and Isaac Friedlander's "Gold digger," (1932) people struggle just to survive, working hard for little reward. In Hanlon's "Corridor," the shopping cart is, on the one hand, an overflowing garbage collection device and, conversely, the Horn of Plenty, the ironic symbol of rampant consumerism. Then, in "Gold digger," trash becomes pure gold to a ragged scavenger.

Most people don't consider tented people working in fields as homeless. Dorothea Lange photographed a young mother with her two babies, one holding a nipples Coke bottle, seated in a Ford near Tulalake, California in 1939. Near her photo in the exhibit hangs East Bay photographer David Bacon's image of a Mexican mother and child camped out on a hillside in Del Mar, California, in the present.

"They are still the same," said Chandler of the two photos. "The only difference is nowadays they would take your kids from you." Chandler was brought up housed in Seattle. She knew nothing of homelessness until she lost her home and state agencies gave her three children to relatives. She found personal strength in street survival.



"And Now Where?"

Lithograph by Rockwell Kent

The homeless woman seated among the feet of busy downtown pedestrians in Christine Hanlon's painting, "Faux Street Revisited," depressed her. Being "invisible" to passers-by on the street is hard. Chandler humanizes herself by drawing people into conversation.

"I get smart with them sometimes," she said with a smile. "I say, 'Close your eyes. I'm not here. If I'm so invisible asking for help, I guess I'm that invisible when I tell you what I think of you.'"

Understanding this human need for respect and dignity, Hanlon stated that she constructed the space so vanishing points lead to the homeless woman's heart. The viewer looks up — not down — at her.

DISPLACED, ROOTLESS, VULNERABLE

Poor, precariously housed, or unhoused San Franciscans like my invitees Terry Chandler, Eric Robinson, David Suttles, and Travis, lose homes for various reasons — renter or homeowner evictions, loss of paychecks and work, or serious illness. Robinson couch-surfs with a friend while saving up rent. Chandler sleeps in daylight, and walks during the nights for safety. Suttles sells *Street Sheet* for rent for his wife and himself. Travis was displaced from a hotel during a hospitalization but is temporarily housed again.

Hazelwood believes the inevitable vulnerability of displacement and rootlessness is a U.S. social norm. Our emphasis on money and "moving up" tears us from our safety nets.

Giacomo Patri's illustrated novel, "White Collar," (1938) tells of a middle-class working stiff on the "advancement" treadmill. The stock market crashes. With repeated firings, Patri's character converts, as Hazelwood tells it, from "sneering disinterest in revolutionary speakers and blue-collar organizers he passes on the street," to being blacklisted for unionizing white-collar workers. He and his wife become homeless.

Catholicism and the backlash against war and capitalism in the 1960s and 1970s

sensitized Jos Sances to the twin cruelties of privilege and poverty. Sances' symbolism thrusts the viewer into the reality and heart of homelessness. A Boston-born, Irish-Sicilian, altar boy, Sances changed from his "devout" Catholicism to become an atheist, but preserved in his art the fragile beauty of Jesus' humanity.

Robinson warned to Sances' ceramic image of Jesus' "Sacred Heart" surrounding, then evicting, a mother, father, and two babies from its loving embrace. Robinson, his parents and twin siblings suffered such an eviction.

For Sances, "the symbol of the Sacred Heart is profound — Christ's compassion for us, the flawed ones." The piece came from Sances' "wish that people exhibited more compassion for people in need. There are wonderful Catholics committed to social action and helping people in distress, working hard to change the system so people aren't victimized" by a cruel eviction.

However, the piece is "meant to be a betrayal, too. This sacred heart that is holding them is also evicting them. The heart is the container of love," yet "the darker side of the piece" is that, "because they don't have the money to pay their rent, they are being evicted from this vessel of love — expelled from the community."

"Sacred Heart" symbolizes "the callousness that people allowed that to happen," Sances said. "The price of the callousness for those poor people, and the pain they suffer, is enormous."

URBAN VS. RURAL

Post-Ronald Reagan, Hazelwood observed, we have seen the destruction of the social safety net and a progressive downward slide into the devastating defunding of federal money for public housing in U.S. cities. Hazelwood's "Spirit of Abandon" and Claude Moller's "Housing Crisis: Condition Critical," render pictorially accessible the harsh statistics that show the shocking extent of the defunding of urban affordable housing.

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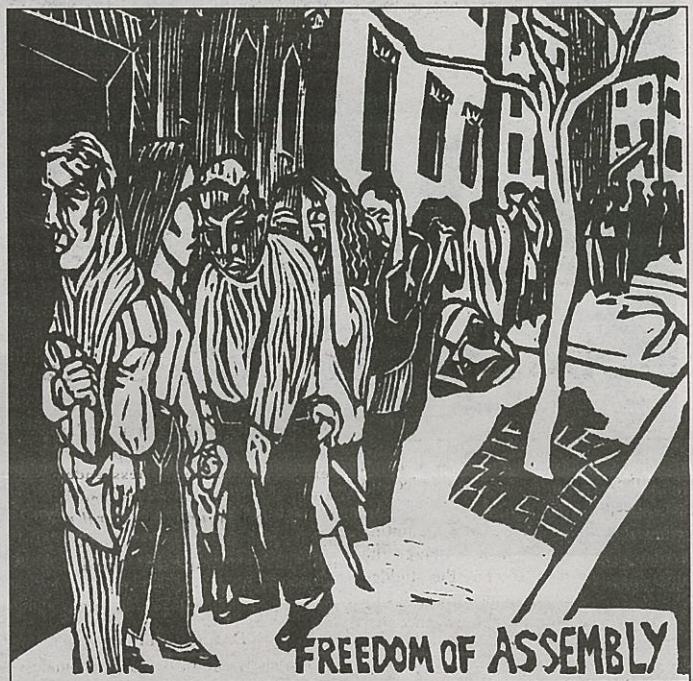
"Mother And Two Children On The Road, Tulelake, Siskiyou County, California, 1939." Dorothea Lange photo
Library of Congress photograph, collection of de Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University



"Bread Line, 1935" Courtesy of M. Lee Stone Fine Prints Lithograph by Iver Rose



Indigenous woman and child in the community of farm workers from Oaxaca, living in a camp outside Delmar, California. David Bacon photo



"Four Freedoms" [Freedom of Assembly] Linocut by Art Hazelwood

Hobos to Street People

from page 14

Most people think of homelessness as urban. Ed Gould's artwork, "America's Forgotten Homeless People," charts the disappearance of rural affordable housing. Chandler said she worries about people in the country. "They couldn't survive like we can here (in the cities) because there is nothing for them out there."

STRUGGLE AND HOPE

Hazelwood compared today's poverty imagery with Depression-era art which refused to divest the poor of nobility or hope. He believes hope was stronger in Depression artists than today.

Rockwell Kent's skillful lithograph, "And Now Where?" etches an uprooted couple as in stone or steel, statue-like, peering lovingly together into their future. Richard Correll's "Drought" displays a proud farm woman, "strong, independent and able to deal with life's difficulties."

Both the attitudes of the uprooted and contemporary imagery mirror the often hopeless struggle of today's homelessness. After Travis' father lost his carpentry business and his mother her nursing job, their Detroit home was foreclosed. Travis left so he wouldn't burden them. He saw the noble couple in "And Now Where?" through a contemporary lens. The illustration reminded him that, despite their love, his parents could not verbalize their mutual pain.

In Kiki Smith's drawing, "Home,"

sleeping boots stick from a cardboard box. This image reminded Travis of his gratitude at being protected by a lowly cardboard box during sub-zero winter nights in Manhattan.

Janel Vain Winkelman compares her colorful "New Drop Dead Welfare Center" to Auschwitz-like ovens. She paints about her eviction, wishing for "free lethal injections. Why couldn't they just kill all of us then, and end our horrendous suffering? Wouldn't that be more humane?" Her "Greedy Landlords I Can't Pay Your Rent," seems a stress response to living perpetually on the edge.

Norman Rockwell's bygone illustrations are several times satirized in this show. His "Freedom from Want" is a homey Thanksgiving dinner. His "Freedom from Fear" depicts a couple putting their son to bed as the husband holds a paper with a World War II headline. The image suggests, "We're safe here in America."

By contrast, in Hazelwood's series, "Four Freedoms," "Freedom from Want" displays a homeless man's sign saying, "Beaten, robbed, help please." "Freedom of Assembly" is the right to line up for food outside a church like Glide. Hazelwood satirizes Rockwell's evocation of FDR's vision of a hopeful future and the failed dreams of 1950s America.

The words, "Everyone has a right," march across Robert Terrell's Market Street photographs brutally portraying an elderly homeless woman and an AIDS

sufferer accompanied by a quote from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which the United States is a signatory, guaranteeing housing for all. The bitter reality mocks the Rockwell-like promise.

Jesus Barraza's San Francisco Print Collective poster bears the words: "How many Homeless people does it take to start a revolution?" Across it is written, "There are 15,000 homeless people in San Francisco. Is that enough?" A black silhouetted figure holding a gun poses before an orange shopping cart. "When that came out," Hazelwood observed, "it was vilified and mocked by *The Chronicle*."

"Poor people's rebellions are not unheard of," asserted Hazelwood. As the Depression began, dispossessed World War I veterans, the "Bonus Marchers," were denied promised government benefits. "When they protested in Washington," he said, "President Hoover ordered General MacArthur to clear the Mall, and he led the last cavalry charge in U.S. history against U.S. military veterans."

In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King's Poor People's Campaign marched down that same Washington Mall. "It happens," muttered David Suttles, as he slid past the poster toward Eric Drooker's "Sleeping Giant," slumped over a street light, unaware of its powerful size.

Paul Boden, WRAP director, calls for a serious re-evaluation of federal response to homelessness. San Francisco officials created the "Care Not Cash" program, a

backlash against the poor born from our government's addressing poverty by putting the blame on the poor and homeless as if something is wrong with them.

In the New Deal era, the government humanized, supported, and funded images of the poor. New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia and the city public housing director paid an artist to create the 1936 poster about Manhattan's rundown tenements entitled, "Why Must We Always Have This? Why Not Housing?"

The New Deal government, said Boden, supported artists portraying a "broken system" which must be made new. Conversely, modern government and media promote images of poor and homeless people as "broken people" to be "fixed."

Boden said that the exhibit encourages our reassessment of the ways we see and talk about homelessness and poverty. "If we can bomb and rebuild Iraq," he said, "we can rebuild the Bayview." Massive war funding and bank bailouts tell us how quickly the country's sociopolitical will makes money available.

Curator Hazelwood said, "We've been through this before. We can rise to the occasion again. The government did something about the Depression. The government could do something about our current economic crisis, poverty, and homelessness. We don't have to live with this terrible situation. We can get through it."

See More art from exhibit page 16

Hobos to Street People Exhibit

California Historical Society
678 Mission Street, San Francisco

Art exhibit continues to August 15, 2009

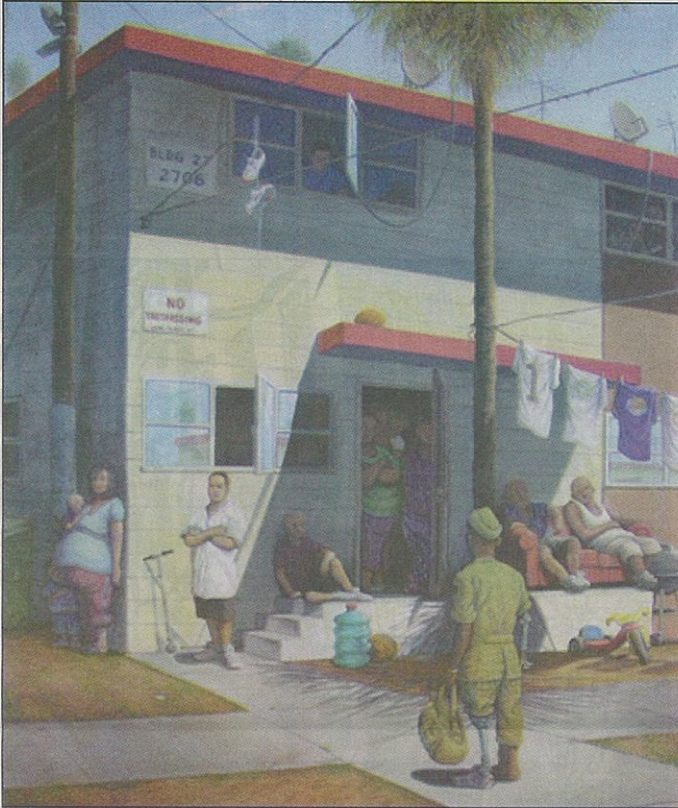
Thursday, August 6, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
California Historical Society. Free.

Panel discussion with Curator Art Hazelwood and artists
Christine Hanlon, Jos Sances, Doug Minkler and Jesus Barraza.



"Faux Street Revisited"

Painting by Christine Hanlon, Oil on Canvas



"GI Homecoming"

Sandow Birk, Oil on Canvas

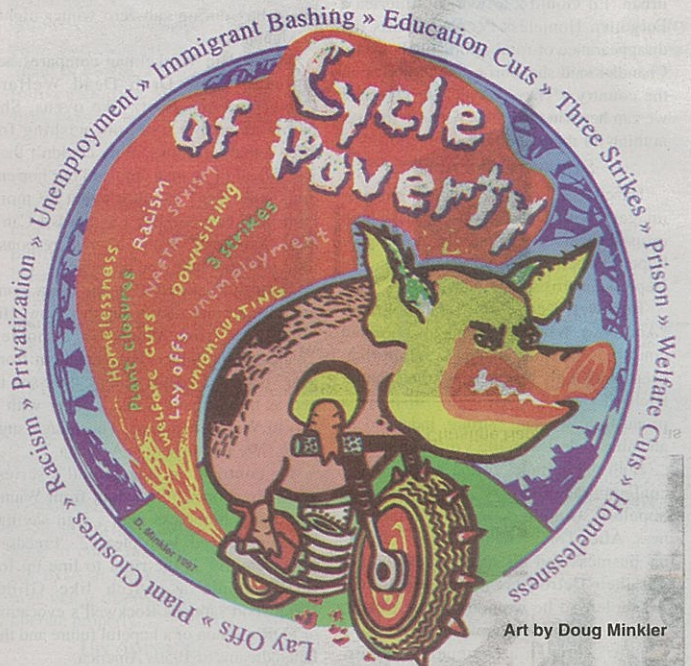


"The Hand That Takes"

Artwork by Eric Drooker



"Must we always have this? Why not housing?" Silkscreen, Federal Art Project, 1936, New York City Housing Authority. Poster promotes housing as the solution to inner-city problems, showing an inkblot on which are drawn elements of inner-city life.



Art by Doug Minkler

Who Drives the Cycle of Poverty?

- A. Welfare Queens
- B. Illegal Aliens
- C. Bleeding Heart Liberals
- D. Capitalist Pigs

Answer: D