

**Blaming the Victims:
Creating Homelessness for Profit**

by Patrecia Barrett

In cities all across the country, fortunes are being made by tearing down entire low-income neighborhoods and replacing them with "upper-end" homes, revenue-producing recreational projects, and whatever else will increase the local tax base and fill city coffers. Redding is no exception. In addition to the vast amounts of money made by developers, investors and property owners in positions of influence, this widespread destruction of housing for the poor has enabled local administrators to "earn" salaries on a level with members of Congress.

Homes and apartment buildings in the Martin Luther King neighborhood and the Parkview area (which borders the new City Hall) were condemned and demolished, when these areas were declared "blighted". The Redding Redevelopment Agency defines "stagnant property values", "residential overcrowding" (a determination left to the personal judgment of local officials), and "lack of retail or other commercial activity" as signs of blight, which is extensive and general enough to include many Redding

neighborhoods. "Mini-mansions" have now been constructed throughout much of the Parkview area, which represent far more in the way of property taxes for the City than the buildings that originally occupied this land.

A large residential motel on North Market Street, the Casa Blanca, was condemned in 2001 for what the local media termed "code violations in outbuildings". The Casa Blanca was home to a number of elderly and disabled people, including a woman who had just undergone heart surgery and who was evicted despite the fact that her doctor provided the City with a statement to the effect

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that moving her at that time could endanger her life. Another residential motel, the El Rancho, was also condemned

in 2001, and this property is now occupied by an extension of the RABA bus yard. Two disabled people who had been residents of the El Rancho for seven years committed suicide after being told by police that they had one hour to vacate the premises. The low-income housing market was nearly nonexistent by that time, and the majority of those who were displaced received no concrete help in relocating beyond being given a standard listing of "low-income and affordable housing" which generally had lengthy waiting periods.

A third residential motel, the Roberts, was purchased by a religious-based organization in August of 2002, shortly before it was slated to be shut down by the City, and its rents were nearly doubled (along with the City's motel tax), placing it beyond the financial reach of most of the elderly and disabled Social Security recipients who were its former tenants. Shortly after the destruction of much of Redding's low-income housing began in 2001, the local rental vacancy rate dropped to less than 1% and homelessness more than tripled.

According to a recent census published by the City of Redding and Shasta County Continuum of Care Council (figures available through their website as of May 3, 2006), there were at least 3,598 homeless individuals in Shasta County during the 12-month period of its survey. Approximately one-third of them were children (the COC is a group of governmental and private agencies charged with conducting an annual census of the local homeless population on behalf of Shasta County in order to qualify for federal funding).

Proponents of "redevelopment" encountered one major obstacle to the implementation of their plans: how to avert public outrage over making what were predominantly working families, the elderly and the disabled homeless, with no replacement housing available. They dealt with this situation in the same manner that other cities have successfully stifled opposition, by launching an anti-homeless campaign with a continuing barrage of articles in the local corporate media criminalizing and denigrating the homeless. In addition to the hundreds of such articles the people of Redding have been exposed to over the past five years, no fewer than 18 articles of this type appeared during the space of a recent two-month period alone which portrayed the homeless as being criminal, drug-addicted, contemptuous destroyers of property and the public peace who are taking advantage of the "generous" amount of assistance available to the poor and homeless in our area. A number of these articles have been accompanied by large, dramatic photographs designed to frighten or enrage the general public. Nowhere in any of these articles is "redevelopment", the massive exodus of jobs from our area, or the record number of businesses that have declared bankruptcy over the past five years mentioned as a causative factor in relation to homelessness.

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**Crossing the Cultural Divide
Without Anger**

by Cat McAdams

Most of us on the *blue state* side of our cultural divide are overwhelmed in frustration with the unquestioning aspect of a lot of *red state* thinking. It's helpful to look at this problem of the reluctance to question, from the larger perspective of the evolution of human thought. Critical thinking among a few intellectual leaders of society is probably only a few thousand years old. It's only been a few generations since we started trying to teach everyone to read. Understanding what we have read well enough to ask questions is a whole different process from just reading the words. The focus in our schools today is on the memorization of facts for testing. We're not successfully teaching the kind of critical thinking necessary to grasp the big picture. Why should we be angry with people who don't question the status quo? For a million years, the purpose of education has been to learn established tribal tradition.

Money, not the happiness of our citizens, is the bottom line of our economy. As a substitute teacher in Humboldt and Trinity County schools since 1994, I've seen the effects of this mental-

ity in our students. In the college prep classes for the kids with a future, the students usually have reasonable behavior and a reasonable amount of interest in their work. In the non college classes for the economically sacrificed, many students are angry and disruptive, and most are unmotivated. We need politics with heart. We need a Democratic Party in touch with its roots. If that proves to be impossible we need a third party that reaches out to all and doesn't focus too exclusively on divisive issues. We need to rise above the narrowness of our personal issues and aim for common ground.

How many times have you seen a red neck caricature playing an undesirable part in a movie? People get angry and stubborn when they feel that their basic identity has been disrespected. We need to reach out and talk to these folks on the other side of the fence. The best strategy is to find common ground and stick to it. Keep it simple. Prioritize. It's better to stick to one idea than bring up five to be rejected and cause anger. Every person that we speak to matters. We will only be heard if we speak to people with respect and listen seriously to what they say. How successful is a teacher who is angry with her students for not already knowing what she is supposed to teach them? To be effective, we must evolve emotionally as well as intellectually. If we want to end war, we must

start in the battle ground of our own hearts.

There may not be as many red states as we think, after all. A popular, nationally published magazine ran an article last year on election irregularities in Ohio, in 2004. According to the article, twenty-six state exit polls incorrectly predicted wins for Kerry. The odds against this happening are 16.5 million to one. Rumors abound that states with big gaps between the exit poles and the official results had paperless voting machines. For current information on accurate voting, check out www.blackboxvoting.org and www.verifiedvoting.org. If you are concerned, it only takes a few minutes to call or email your state and national representatives. You can vote verified by absentee ballot.

