

**The
BLACK
C o M M e n t a t o r**

Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

December 11 , 2008 - Issue 303

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

[Click Here](#)

[Home](#)

**Red Alert: Human Beings Out There Dying!
Represent Our Resistance
By Dr. Lenore J. Daniels, PhD
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

The property-owning class and the class of the proletariat represent the same human self-alienation. But the former feels at home in this self-alienation and feels itself confirmed by it; it recognizes alienation as its own instrument and in it possesses the semblance of a human existence. The latter feels itself destroyed by this alienation and sees in it its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence.

-Karl Marx, *Capitol*

So the pretence that society is regulated by 'external, iron' laws which branch off into the different special laws applying to particular areas is finally revealed for what it is: a pretence.

-Georg Luckacs, *History and Class Consciousness*

There must be a better distribution of wealth and maybe America must move toward a democratic socialism.

-Martin Luther King

No one can dub you with dignity. That's yours to claim.

-Odetta

In the film, *Michael Clayton*, the lead attorney for a multi-billion dollar argi-corporation that produces killer weed seeds is, himself, killed. The lead counselor, who orchestrates the killing, is a well-tuned component of the U/North machine. U/North's PR component presents the corporation as a Good Samaritan: It's a corporation that serves the "little people" of the world by creating seeds for life to grow. Who doesn't commend the idea of a multi-billion dollar company of Good Samaritans?

For 6 years, U/North has thrown billions into a case against plaintiffs who have dared to accuse the corporation of murder. The clog in the machinery is not these plaintiffs complaining about 400 dead relatives. It's the lead attorney who becomes a real problem. Along with his clothes, he's "lost" his mind at a typical deposition, according to the U/North corporate narrative.

He's part of the machine, and he's gone "mad." He's a red flag for the lead counselor of U/North as she discovers he not only refuses to go along with a machine that knowingly kills people and then oppresses their resistance, but the document in his possession proves U/North was told about the dangers of its weed killer.

He describes himself as filthy inside, suffering from a cancer he can't get at, but he sees clear across the whole machinery now that he's off his medication for depression. He's far from "depressed" now. But it's not enough to stop the meds and take off expensive clothes: he must act against U/North.

So the scene comes. It's quiet and silent. The two hired killers work in the dark crevices of the machinery, pay a house call and inject the attorney with an overdose his own medicines. The attorney's death, according to the police, is "definitive" for suicide. Pills are everywhere. Did he leave a note? Maybe he forgot or things got out of hand too quickly. Besides, we, the police have heard *the* narrative: he was troubled; he was having trouble. End of story here. U/North moves on. They see an "opportunity." They want to take advantage of it. It's their case. They will "settle" with the plaintiffs.

But what lingers is this exchange between the lead attorney and the "fixer" sent to restore the attorney to his right mind, in step with the machinery of death. "I'm not the enemy," says the "fixer."

"Then who are you?"

The fixer is like many: a divorcee, a father of a young son, a failed businessman with debts, a gambler, and a lawyer who isn't the trial lawyer he was in the past. He needs employment with companies like the unethical law firm who employs him as a fixer to at least appear "normal," regular," and "successful" - so he *thinks*. For all his intelligence, he never asked the question of himself: Who are you?

Distain for human beings finds advocates in strange places.

The divine doesn't bless everyone, particularly not the homeless,

property-less, the poor, the low-wage earner. *The divine* blesses particular *individuals*. The divine blesses particular individuals whether they are members of the religious right, the conservatives, or the liberals. Amassing financial wealth is the measure of how the divine blesses an individual. Successful individuals are those blessed by the divine. So ingrained is this ideology of disdain for human life even the homeless, property-less, the poor, and the low-wage earner have succumbed to the despair that "the divine" has abandoned them."

If the divine, as perceived by some, is undemocratic, then most certainly the acquisition of profits is undemocratic.

Corporatism is another form of religion in which money is the god and the path to freedom. But even here, freedom isn't for everyone. Some need freedom *excised* from their lives in CIA-back coups. The corporatist need not be a Christian, but the corporatist must believe in small government, de-regulation, and free trade. Above all, the corporatist must believe in the acquisition of P-R-O-F-I-T-S, the invisible hand of the divine gold that turns the world around. For the corporatist, everyone isn't blessed with gold! And why should it be otherwise?

We are not simply between the Christian and the corporatists. It's not that simple. Nothing really is. But the two groups account for a formidable number of U.S. citizens who, for the life of them, can't envision a democratic society.

But this isn't the stuff of *polite* conversation. But maybe there should be conversation that takes place one-on-one. Maybe the question: "who are you?" should be asked by the average American citizen who serves, in whatever capacity, the machinery that ultimately *kills*. The lead attorney discovers (through his immediate contact with a particular plaintiff) that he is a high-paid legend in the courtroom, defending *evil* perpetuated not by a god or a stroke of misfortune on the part of the plaintiffs - but perpetuated by humans against other humans. Humans disdain other human beings. Humans readily, without hesitation, kill and cover up the crime. But the Fixer, like any good storyteller, pieced together the true story, starting with the "death" through which he discovers the 400 plus victims of U/North's weed killer.

While I was thinking about writing this article, I thought about the murder manufactured to appear as a "self-inflected death" (suicide) in the middle of *Michael Clayton*. In the U.S. where billions are handed off to corporate cutthroats, the homeless (many of whom are unemployed workers and Iraq vets) are handed a death sentence. This population of humanity experiences a social death made to appear "self-inflected" when a cardboard box on the side of a freeway or on a populated street becomes home.

You have to ask the question and make a decision...

The recent "homeless," through foreclosures, exposed the latest fiasco of the corporatists. But the corporatist's Fixer, Treasury Secretary, Henry Paulson

warned: as the Wall Street corporatists fall, the State will tumble. The Average citizen and the State paid attention and listened to the pleas of the corporatists and their Fixer - but not the pleas of the homeless, the long-time homeless, a segment of the population that serves as the best measure of a tumbling State.

In another film, we are walking the streets along with 70 year-old John Werner. He's talking about his favorite building, the "most beautifully designed building" he's ever seen in his life. Off camera, he is asked to go back 20 years. "I would properly feel sorry for them. But I'd also be puzzled... How did your life get so fouled up that you end up without a roof over your head?" He pauses.

"Hard to believe," Werner says.

Was this before you became homeless, asks the voice off camera.

It's affirmative. "I went through it for 14 1/2 years...I have no feeling at all. I'm like dead inside."

"Some people don't think its ever going to happen to them," says another homeless man.

"It's really like a snowball going down the hill. It's just picking up steam (sic). One day you are outside the place you're living in. You don't know what the hell happened," another says.

"You'd think people would care about people like that," a woman says to the camera.

In August, 2007, a camera crew followed the work of Operation Safety Net (OSN) (under the auspices of The Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh) on the streets of Pittsburgh, PA. The result is an outstanding 31-minute film, *One Bridge to the Next*. Since 1993, OSN has provided health care and support to Pittsburgh's homeless. Its founder, Dr. James Withers walked "from one bridge to the next" looking for the human beings others don't want to see or hear.

Under every bridge, there are stories to unravel only to connect them to that larger narrative of an indifferent and a corporatist society.

"By any measure, people who become homeless have crossed a line, and they are no longer part of the community." They are "at fault for their conduct and judged at a distance," Dr. James Withers told me by phone. They are the socially dead.

In the last twenty years, Dr. Withers said, people have been given "permission to be selfish." They have been persuaded to look after themselves. He hopes the tide is changing with this election [2008 Presidential election] and people will look after each other."

John Werner, we discover, cared for a very ill mother. He spent 3,100 dollars per month on her care. In total, he spent some 45,000 dollars of his savings before he placed his mother in a hospice. Because the home Werner and his mother lived in was in her name, he was forced to leave it. Werner found himself without a roof over his head.

Werner is a former architect.

Another man sits at a bus stop with all his possessions - in bags. Citizens have complained. The sight and smell of Paul Robertson is just too much. He understands their complaints. As you watch, it's clear that he wouldn't want to offend the "good" citizens if he could help it. But the citizens respond! They contacted Dr. Withers to have Mr. Robertson removed! But Dr. Withers and his team have a more immediate issue to tend to first.

We see that Robertson's right leg and foot are three-times its normal size. People passing by him should have seen this too. But they see what they have been taught to see. In fact, Robertson is a laid-off steel mill worker. "When the mill closed down, people lost their jobs." The street outreach team begins the work to locate housing for Robertson.

We visit a hospital room where a young woman, 30-years old, is suffering from cervical cancer. She is homeless and worried about her access to chemotherapy. There are women, Dr. Withers explains, young women, "with cervical cancer because a higher percentage of women are unable to get screening." Dr. Withers will call on his medical resources to help this woman.

Yet, people, *angry*, asked Dr. Withers why he spends his time treating the homeless. Deconstruct: why waste your good education and skills with this population - this unworthy population?

I didn't even prompt him and there it was: he confronted himself! He asked the question: Who are you?

"I am always thinking - who am I?"

Dr. Withers's parents are credited with teaching him another narrative, one that sees all people as human beings. And even while many find the idea of love too "soapy" and others profess love with conditions, Dr. Withers says it is love that moves him to return to the streets, night after night, to meet the people living under viaducts and in cardboard boxes.

"When you go outside your comfort zone, [you are] no longer secure." At first, he was the "authority with the white coat." But soon, Dr. Withers dumped the "white coat" and "re-discovered" himself "in another context, in someone else's world."

He decides that self-alienation is not an option! He saw a change, he told me, to "connect to people who have been disconnected."

"We are facing a time when a lot of people are not able to make it," says Dr.

Withers near the end of *One Bridge to the Next*. "They are falling into the homeless population. They are no longer part of us." American citizens can and do weave absorbing stories about who is and isn't blessed, or who decides to be poor and homeless, or who is unable to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. In the U.S., other human beings have condemned these people - not "the divine" and not some "tragic flaw."

In contrast, the Europeans are "appalled that we [American citizens] don't reach out" to this population, Dr. Withers told me. The governments and their citizens "don't just throw away" the poor and homeless in most European countries.

This street outreach team conducts its most significant work at night. In the clinic-on-wheels (a converted RV), the team pays house calls to the camps sites where the homeless sleep. Recognizing the autonomy of another human being, the medical team listens to the individual's story. They listen for an "opening" to assist the individual in the restoration of his or her own dignity. It's hard to stand straight and see forward if you are a snowball going down the hill. There "may be options" for the individual," Dr. Withers said, options that person "didn't see" in the days leading up to their arrival on the streets. "It's important to establish a level of trust and respect," Withers said.

To date, 80 percent of the people Dr. Withers's medical teams have treated have remained in housing. With a staff of ten people, OSN has created Street Medicine Institute (SMI), "a consulting service," Withers explains, "to help communities who want to do street medicine."

Dr. James Withers and his street outreach team are people Rev. Martin Luther King would commend, but King would continue to condemn the political, economic, and social system that would allow this atrocity against humanity.

Why do we have an inhuman health care system? Why do we have poverty, unemployment, and nearly 800,000 chronically homeless in this nation-state?

More specifically, what kind of nation-state, claiming superiority and almightiness, engages in wars it can't win, with money it doesn't have - while it has an ever increasing population living on streets - not so paved in gold?

What kind of nation-state is the United States of America? What kind of human beings does she value?

At the end of *One Bridge to the Next*, Dr. Withers stands next to a wall with plaques. The plaques have names on them. They are the names of the homeless who have died in Pittsburgh alone. The wall disputes the lie that these are self-inflicted deaths. Dr. Withers concludes: "as the wall gets more and more crowded, people begin to understand a little better that there are human beings out here dying."

Who is responsible for the killing here?

For more information re:

Operation Safety Net

Mail: 1518 Forbes Avenue

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Phone : 412 232 5739

Toll Free: 1 888 492 8950

Email: jwithers@mercy.pmhs.org

One Bridge to the Next

Mail: Two North Riverside Plaza, Suite 1111

Chicago, IL 60606

Phone: 312 715 0200

[Click here to comment on any article
in this issue or see what others are saying in the](#)

The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog


BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, Lenore Jean Daniels, PhD, has been a writer, for over thirty years of commentary, resistance criticism and cultural theory, and short stories with a Marxist sensibility to the impact of cultural narrative violence and its antithesis, resistance narratives. With entrenched dedication to justice and equality, she has served as a coordinator of student and community resistance projects that encourage the Black Feminist idea of an equalitarian community and facilitator of student-teacher communities behind the walls of academia for the last twenty years. Dr. Daniels holds a PhD in Modern American Literatures, with a specialty in Cultural Theory (race, gender, class narratives) from Loyola University, Chicago. Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Daniels.

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

Click Here

[Home](#)

Click Here To

CONTRIBUTE TO  NOW

Click Here To

CONTACT 

Your comments are always welcome.

e-Mail re-print notice

If you send us an e-Mail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002 - 2008
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved